

Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 11

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Prologue

A certain Dungeon Core known by the number 629 was resting on a grassy plain as he managed his dungeon. He was a rabbit-type Dungeon Core with orange fur, and the first floor of his dungeon was in fact the grassy plain in question.

“Gosh. Where’re all the adventurers? This is super booring,” Dungeon Core Number 629 said while bouncing around with three other rabbits. The other rabbits were technically dungeon monsters. Unlike normal rabbits, they had a single horn on their foreheads which marked them as Horned Rabbits, though that was about the only thing that separated them from normal rabbits.

“I got a grasshopper! Look, loook!” a rabbit said.

“Nom nom nom... Grass is tasty!” another said.

“Gaah! Who bit my eaaar?!” the third said. They were all having fun playing together. It was a very heartwarming sight.

Language-wise, Core 629 could understand them more than well enough thanks to being a rabbit-type Core himself. The only problem was that they weren’t too intelligent and didn’t always listen to his orders.

“Come on, you guys. Do your job and patrol the dungeon! Don’tcha want to eat carrots?”

“But I meaaan. You’re not motivated either, 629.”

“The weather’s niiice, the grass is niiice, why bother?”

“I wanna keep fluffing up my tail!”

Core 629 shook his head and sighed at the lackadaisical rabbits. His dungeon was peaceful, and while relaxing in the sun was fine, that wouldn’t earn him any DP. Killing grasshoppers only earned 1 DP. Locusts were 5 DP. In these grassy plains where humans rarely appeared, hunting grasshoppers was an important means of earning pocket change.

“Ah!”

A hawk suddenly flew across the sky. Carnivorous hawks were the mortal enemy of rabbits, regardless of whether they could talk or if they had horns. Hawks only saw them as food. Back when Core 629 had just started the dungeon and there was no underground floor, he had lost many good rabbit brothers to hawk attacks.

“Brothers, to arms! We must fight off the intruder!”

“Roger!” the three rabbits yelled. They would be dead if the hawk

got them, and thus quickly went into their anti-hawk formation. Two of the Horned Rabbits formed a stand, onto which the third climbed. Then, Core 629 lifted up a paw.

“Okay! I’m peacing out! Good luck!”

“Whaaat?!”

“It only makes sense. This dungeon’s over if I die.”

“That’s true, but...”

“Isn’t this kinda cruel?”

“Oh, wait, the hawk’s coming. Fight, fiiight!”

The hawk ducked its head and shot down at high speed. The third rabbit waited for the perfect opportunity, then jumped, using the other two as a springboard for his attack. By jumping after the other two jumped, he could launch toward the hawk like a rocket in what could fairly be described as the ultimate horn tackle. Thus was their ultimate anti-hawk technique, the Bouncy Bouncy Attack!

“Oh, he missed.”

“Oof.”

“Welp, he’s dead.”

It was flawed, however, in that they only had one shot, and a miss meant a rabbit flying helplessly through the air. But still, despite the attack missing, the hawk halted its descent and flew back up for a second attempt.

“Don’t give up, brothers! We still have another chance!”

“But you’re about to run away, Core 629.”

“It’s fine! I’ll be the platform this time!”

They quickly got back in their formation, with Core 629 serving as part of the platform this time. A Horned Rabbit placed a foot on Core 629’s head and prepared for a second attack. The hawk lowered its head again and shot straight for the rabbits.

“Now! Bouncy Bouncy Attack round two!”

“Er, wait.”

“Ngh, what?!” Core 629’s legs buckled and he fell forward. The hawk shot down to seize the opportunity, but the rabbit they had launched earlier coincidentally fell and slammed into its head from above.

“Screee...?! Ngk!” The hawk fell to the ground, the poor landing killing it on impact.

“That was embarrassing, but I’m back.”

“Good job. I’ll groom your fur later as a reward.”

“We’re proud to be your older brothers.”

The three Horned Rabbits had a family hug. Core 629 took the opportunity to rub off the dirt stuck to his head and absorb the hawk corpse. That gave him 150 DP. Not bad.

“Hah. That hawk wasn’t a match for us after all. Easy win!”

“You tried to run away, Core 629.”

“Riiight? He totally did.”

“...What, you’re going to hold that over my head forever? Okay then! Take this! Reward strawberries!”

“Strawberries!” To rabbits, strawberries were a fantastic treat that they rarely got to eat. They would get stomach aches if they ate too many, but a small amount was the sweetest delicacy imaginable.

Buying a few with the DP he just got should be fine. Core 629 looked at the three Horned Rabbits and shook his head.

“Usually he only lets us eat grass at the Grass Spawner, yeah.”

“That grass tastes great, but strawberries are something else!”

“Eheheh, strawberries, gimme strawberries! This is why I bother patrolling at all...!”

“...Sheesh, here. Now get back to work. Unless you don’t want strawberries, I mean.”

“Strawberries!”

Incidentally, this dungeon—the [Rabbit Paradise]—had a pretty well-developed basement floor beneath the plains area. There were Wizard Rabbits that had mastered the arcane arts, Armored Rabbits that wore tough armor like an armadillo’s shell, and even Soldier Rabbits that could walk on two legs and use weaponry. They were deadly enough that newbie adventurers chasing rabbits underground were never seen again. Only one percent of adventurers survived the dungeon, being exclusively those who wisely turned back at the plains.

Thanks to its thorough efficiency in murdering intruders, the [Rabbit Paradise] remained a wild dungeon not identified by the guild, and although there were a few adventurers who knew there was a dungeon in the general vicinity, it was impossible to distinguish one unmarked plain from another. Many considered its existence just a rumor, or perhaps something they had seen in a dream.

* * *

The [Rabbit Paradise] was as peaceful as ever. But that all changed when a certain intruder appeared.

“Well, what do we have here?! Is this a dungeon I spy?!”

The entrance to the dungeon was named the Rabbit Pitfall, and at the time everyone thought some more easy prey had fallen inside. They thought they could just surround the adventurer and beat him up as usual. However...

“W-Wait! Don’t attack!” Core 629 yelled, messaging everyone in the dungeon and halting their advance.

“What’s this, then? You beasts choose not to attack?”

Core 629 hopped out in front of the unfazed intruder, ignoring the

several rabbits who told him it was dangerous. The intruder looked down at him and his fluffy orange fur as he emerged from the group of rabbits, then laughed derisively. But that was a worthy sacrifice. Core 629 knew for a fact that if his dungeon monsters attacked, they all would have died. He was sure of it. There was strength in numbers and in surrounding someone, but if the opponent in question was too strong, nothing would come from human wave tactics except a slaughter.

“Erm, umm, are you a Dungeon Core? You’re in human form, but...”

“Oho! You are... not someone I remember. State your number.”

“I’m Core 629. What about you?”

“I am Core 564. An elite in the Demon King faction, of course.” The intruder—Core 564—gave a self-assured cackle. As a Core from the 500s batch, he was significantly older than Core 629, a Core obviously from the 600 batch, and on top of that he had the excess strength to transform into human form.

Not to mention that he was part of the Demon King faction. That was a gathering of Cores which excelled in individual strength, and Core 629 had heard more than a few tales of their conquests. Still, as a fellow Dungeon Core it shouldn’t be impossible to negotiate with this intruder, he thought. They all shared the same Father, after all.

The only exception to that would be the infamous traitor Core 89’s faction, but as a rabbit-type core, Core 629 belonged to the Beast King faction. Everything should be fine as long as he remained humble. Neither of them had been hurt or offended yet, and it was expected that younger Cores would show humility to older Cores.

“...My apologies, Dungeon Core Number 564. I would greatly appreciate it if you would leave my dungeon without causing undue damage. I can take you to the exit.”

“Hah! I’ve never heard a more boring proposition in my life. Why would a coward like you ever join arms with the traitor?”

“...Erm?” Core 629 tilted his fluffy head.

“Hmph. Why would anyone but a traitor make a dungeon in a place like this?”

“What do you mean by that? This is just a plain old field.”

“Playing dumb, are we...? Ah! Oh, I see, I see! This certainly is just a plain old field. Excluding the fact it’s located right in the middle of the warzone between the Empire and Demon Realm!” Core 564 roared with amused laughter.

Core 629, on the other hand, was blinking in surprise. He had never known that his dungeon was in such a hotspot of a location.

“Th-That’s news to me! I started this dungeon right where I was first placed!”

“I see, I see. And that’s why you joined the traitor faction!”

“Whaaat?!” The false accusations kept piling up, but to Core 564 it was the only thing that made sense. What were the chances that a neutral core belonging to neither faction would have a dungeon located right in the middle of a warzone? Slim chances, to be sure.

“It’s a coincidence!”

“There are no coincidences in war! You will not fool me!”

Core 629 was telling the truth, but the circumstances made it hard to believe him.

“I’m part of the Beast King faction! Can’t you tell that from my animal body?!”

“All I see is a weak rabbit. You must have fled to the traitor after the Beast King cut you off.”

It was so unfair he wanted to cry.

“Hmph. You are the exact kind of trash I would expect to see with the traitor. Now, I challenge you to a Dungeon Battle. I am willing to believe your words if you can beat me.”

“Whaaat?! N-No way could I beat you!”

“Then you recognize that you are part of the Traitor faction!”

“NOOO!”

“Heh, then our duel is inevitable. The date shall be... Hm, the gathering is coming up soon, so it can happen after that. You will have half a month to prepare after the gathering! Get what help you can from your traitor brethren, hah!” Core 564 cackled as demonic wings sprouted from his back and goat horns curled out of his head. “The Dungeon Battle will begin when I return! Wait warmly for my arrival! Bwahaha!” He flapped his wings and flew out the hole he had fallen through.

.....

For a minute, Core 629 stared in a daze at the hole Core 564 had just flown up through.

“Core 629, what do we do?”

“Ngh, I dunno... Ah! We need to ask the Beast King for help.”

“But how?”

On second thought, he had no means of communicating with him. Before now, he hadn’t even known the location of any other dungeons, which meant of course he didn’t know where the rest of the Beast King faction was. Sending a letter through a rabbit wouldn’t end well either way.

“...M-Maybe I can make Core 564 understand at the meeting?”

“That means we won’t have to fight, right?”

The Demon King faction was filled with battle-crazed blood junkies. It was difficult to imagine any of them giving up on a fight they had already resolved to have.

“Oh, right! I can just go ask the Beast King for help during the battle!”

“Will he make it in time?”

If Core 564 was to be believed, their dungeon was in an extremely inconvenient place. Any help he called would have to travel across either the Empire or the Demon Realm. That was over a month of travel, physically speaking. They would never make it in time.

“...Gaaah.” He was stuck. So stuck he had to cradle his head in frustration. But that was when he suddenly had an idea, one that might just get him out of this situation.

“...A-At this point, I’ll just have to ask Core 89 for help.” The idea sounded even better after he said it. Contacting her shouldn’t be so hard if he just went over to the Empire. They were both Dungeon Cores, after all. Should be easy. Yeah. If his dungeon was right between the Empire and the Demon Realm, her territory should be extremely close by.

Core 629 briefly thought of Core 695—Rokuko—who was undoubtedly part of the Traitor faction. She, at least, was more agreeable than those bloodthirsty nuts in the Demon King faction. It was probably likely that she would help. If he offered up his allegiance to them, in any case.

And so, Dungeon Core 629 decided to ask the Traitor faction for help. When danger was close, it was better to ask a nearby stranger for help than a distant relative, as the saying went.

“Who’s gonna go?”

“I don’t wanna go.”

“Me neitheer.”

“I know, I know. I’ve gotta be the one to go... She won’t talk to anyone that isn’t a Dungeon Core, I think.”

Dungeon Core 629 steeled his resolve. All that was left was taking action.

“Watch out, be safeee.”

“We’ll pray for you.”

“Our lives are in your hands.”

Core 629 left the plains as his rabbit friends casually saw him off. He opened his map and checked where to go. The sky was high and the wind felt great. His mood, however, was as glum as could be.

“...I’m sure adventurers come here from the imperial capital. So if I go in the direction they came from... Alright! I’ll protect everyone, no matter what!” Core 629 said before hop-hop-hopping off in the direction of the imperial capital.

Chapter 1

The tea party with Haku ended with her having a request for me. Or really, that was largely why she had called me at all, probably... *I knew it. I saw this coming a mile away.*

Rokuko was sticking around to hear the request as well. Or to be specific, she had moved onto Haku's lap. It would be safe... very safe... to say that was why Haku had a huge smile on her face.

...I mean, Rokuko hugging me in front of Haku definitely got her jealous, and Rokuko sitting on her lap was definitely the best way to calm her down, but come on. Did you really have to hug me like that, Rokuko? She may have given us permission to hug, but that's playing with fire. I want to believe you just didn't think about it.. But anyway, Haku's got a request for us. I can already tell it's going to be a pain in the ass.

"So, sister. What's your request?"

"Oh, yes. It's quite simple, really. I'd like you to participate in a Dungeon Battle."

Yep, no surprises there. There's no pain in the ass bigger than a Dungeon Battle, so of course she tosses one onto me.

"...Er. Are you suggesting that we fight again, Haku?" I asked.

"Wait, sister, you want a rematch? I'm game! Or Keima is, anyway!"

"Ah, not quite. This isn't a fight between us. And really, there is no need for you to get involved at all this time, Rokuko." Haku smiled brightly and stroked Rokuko's head. "What I want from Keima is his support... that is, I want his services as an advisor, or perhaps a producer?"

"A producer?" That wasn't a word I heard much in this world. The first thing I thought of when I heard "producer" was idols. It was hard to imagine idols having anything to do with this job. At the very least, I doubt it would be as simple as rhythmically tapping a screen to music.

"I recently learned that there is a dungeon built beneath plains located directly between my Empire and the Demon Realm. I thought there was nothing there at all, but in fact a newborn Core from the 600 batch dungeon had taken root there."

"Oh, the 600 batch, hm? That's the same as my batch," remarked Rokuko.

"Okay... So, what about them?"

“They came asking me for help. Someone from the Demon Realm will kill him if we don’t get involved, he said.”

“...What? He came to *you* for help, Haku?” I asked without thinking. It was just that surprising.

“Is there something wrong with that, hm?”

“Er, I seem to recall the [Flame Caverns] Dungeon Core calling you a traitor.”

“Oh, that. It seems that a ruffian in the Demon Realm concluded wrongly that this innocent core is a part of my faction, and challenged him to a Dungeon Battle. They’re already in the preparation phase.”

The Demon Realm, huh? When it comes to Demon Realm cores, the first Core I think of is Dungeon Core Number 666, Aidy. She’s apparently Rokuko’s archenemy slash true friend slash something something.

“That reminds me, Aidy definitely was always talking about duel after duel,” Rokuko mused. “I wonder if all Demon Realm Cores are so eager to start fights.”

“They certainly are. They’re barbarians that greet each other with challenges to duel. In general, they don’t go so far as murder, but the loser is forced to serve the winner with absolute obedience.”

They greet each other with challenges for duels, and whoever loses is turned into a slave on the spot? That’s actually terrifying.

“So, er... does this Core that’s asking for help not belong to any faction of his own?”

“He was a part of the Beast King faction since he’s an animal-type Core, but it seems he had no means of contacting them. And even if he did, they would be too far away to help in time.”

Ahhh, right, means of communication are pretty limited in this world. Being stuck in between two warring countries on top of that makes it even worse. If the Beast King got involved, this would probably turn into a three-way faction war with some pretty severe consequences.

“In any case, he groveled before me and begged me to save him.”

“What are the chances that he switches sides to the Demon King faction?”

“He might be a spy, too. What are the chances of that?”

Haku responded to my and Rokuko’s suggestions with a shake of her head. “He’s neither. I know that he wasn’t lying, and in any case, the Demon Realm lives by a particular saying: ‘The weak shall die. Or, they shall die.’”

...For a second I thought the use of “or” there was weird, but apparently it was meant to emphasize the difference between dying, dying immediately, and dying after being exploited to some end. They would always die in the end. Not to mention that there was a yearly tournament in the Demon Realm where Cores showed their individual fighting strength. If someone gave a pathetic performance there,

well... You could guess what happened to them next.

“And by the way, this is a rabbit-type Core. It’s fair to say he has no fighting prowess whatsoever.”

“...Yeah, not much chance of him turning over to the Demon Realm.” A single rabbit in a bloodthirsty country of war? He would be dead in no time.

“Well, in the end, we of the Empire would hardly care if a Core like him died. It would hardly have been any skin off our backs if he disappeared without us ever knowing he was there.”

“...So why ask us to help him?”

“You could use this opportunity to strike a blow against the Demon Realm, couldn’t you, Keima? You don’t even have to win, a tie will suffice. I’m sure you could put on a good show for everyone.”

Ahhh. I get it. That’s why she called me a producer instead of an advisor. Although... that could still just be the auto-translator messing around, but yeah.

“A rabbit-type Core... Sister, are you talking about Core 629?”

“That’s right. Oh, if he bullied you, Rokuko, we can absolutely leave him to die. We could have Keima eliminate him on the spot.”

“Oh, no, he was generally nice to me.”

“Then we shall save him. You should know what to do, Keima.”

Apparently Rokuko knows this Core. Good thing you’re a nice guy, Core 629. Karma would have chopped your head off otherwise.

“...So, what about my payment?”

“Did I not just give it to you? Your reward is being allowed to hug Rokuko.”

“Riiight.”

“I’m taking it back if you lose.”

“Good luck, Keima! I’m rooting for you.”

Haku gave a bright smile. *Crap, I can’t tell if she’s joking or not.*

“...By the way, I want to go back to my own dungeon for a second. Is there time for that? It took us a long time to travel all the way here.”

“Of course there is. The [Ivory Beach] is right next door, and you can travel straight to the [Cave of Greed] from there. I can just tell Wataru and the others that I transported you there using my {Teleport}.”

Oh, right, I forgot. We have our own dungeon-exclusive route for traveling back and forth from the capital.

Incidentally, {Teleportation} required more mana depending on the distance and number of people teleporting, so even Haku with her enormous stores of mana had to rest for a day or two while jumping from the capital to the [Cave of Greed]. Before we made the inn, she would spend the night in Tsia.

So yeah, going to the [Cave of Greed] through teleportation would be unreasonable due to all the mana, but the [Ivory Beach] had no such problems. We had traveled through it back in the previous Dungeon Battle with no issue at all.

“I think this is a good opportunity for you to learn {Teleport}, Keima. I will trade you one {Teleport} scroll for three massage chairs.”

Oh man, that’s a fantastic deal. I can make massage chairs basically for free, but {Teleport} scrolls cost tens of millions of DP!

“Sounds like a deal to me... But wait. I know you use {Teleport} on your own, but didn’t you say something about how it’s usually something done by groups of mages pooling their mana together?”

“That won’t be a problem for you. You have an absurd capacity for mana, just like most Heroes. I can promise you that you’ll easily be able to teleport from here to the {Ivory Beach} alongside someone else.”

Haku gave me her seal of approval. *She’s obviously just doing this so I come visit the imperial city with Rokuko more. Wow, if that’s all she can guarantee with an “absurd capacity for mana,” I really have to wonder just how much mana she has herself.*

“Sister, what about me?”

“Well, Rokuko... Mmm... It would still be dangerous for you. Give it a hundred years and you’ll be fine for sure, but given your current rate of growth, it should be ten years at most...? Maybe even just a few years.” Apparently the longer you lived, the more your capacity for mana grew. That was why Haku and all her subordinates could independently use {Teleportation} with her (Misha excluded).

“...Okay, Keima! Let’s learn {Teleport} so you can take me on dates to the capital city!”

“Ngh...! Ngh, ngggh...! Rokuko, dear, please go on dates with me instead! Please?”

“Of course, sister. I want to go on dates with you too!”

“Oh, Rokuko...!”

Hmm. Is Rokuko really not aware of what she’s doing here? She must not be. Listen, Rokuko, Haku’s cycling through horrified and joyous expressions here like a one-woman theater group. Go a little easier on her.

* * *

The Dungeon Battle was set in stone, but we had some time. About a month, to be specific. We would first need to see the Dungeon and Dungeon Core in question before making any hard decisions. For now, we went back to Wataru and the others. According to a maid, they had gone to the estate of Emmymephy’s body double... that is, the Orkluv estate. It was in the Noble’s Quarter, which wasn’t too far

from the castle.

So yeah, Rokuko and I got in a wooden carriage heading for the Orkluv estate. Haku prepared it for us since we couldn't exactly leave the castle on foot. The carriage didn't shake at all, probably due to some nice suspension, and while the paved roads helped, I was still impressed by the quality of carriages that the imperial family had.

Upon arriving at the Orkluv estate, we were taken to a garden. There, Roppe, Niku, and Ichika were holding a mock battle while Wataru, Gozou, and a middle-aged elf with swept back hair watched. Given his nice clothes, the elf was probably Count Dain Orkluv. *I wonder if his daughter's here? I kind of want to see what Mephy's actual body double looks like.*

Wataru, seeing us approach, raised a hand. "Good to see you're still alive, Keima. How was the tea party with Haku?"

"She had a little request for me, and she accepted my relationship with Rokuko. Anyway, Wataru. Who's this?"

"Right, my bad. Gotta introduce you two. This is D—"

"Dain Orkluv. It's good to meet you, Keima. Rokuko."

"Yeah, I'm Keima... er, Keima Goren. Nice to meet you."

"I'm Rokuko."

We all introduced each other. Incidentally, we had a Dyne Company back in Goren. Apparently he was actually named after Dain. No last name for him since he's a commoner, though.

In any case, I went ahead and told Wataru that we'd be going our separate ways.

"Right, right, the quest Haku had for us is something happening far away. She's gonna send us off with {Teleport}. That means it's goodbye for us."

"I see, makes sense. Sounds like Haku. I'll get Gozou and the others home."

"Sounds good. Take good care of them, Wataru."

Gozou gave Wataru a thumbs up. "Er, but Keima, are ye serious 'bout this {Teleport} stuff? Pretty sure that takes a huge group of lads ta cast. Lotsa people die in the process, too."

Whoa, is {Teleport} that dangerous? I could die if it goes bad? Uh, but Haku is going to teach me the spell... I guess I should be careful not to jump too far with it.

"W-Well, Haku can use it all on her own, apparently. She's the Ivory Goddess and all."

"Yeah? Now that's somethin' else. That's the Ivory Goddess for ye... Wait, ain't this like, a real big deal? You're dealin' with the Ivory Goddess herself, Keima, hot damn."

"Think about it like this: She's just Wataru's boss."

"Alright, yea, that's a bit... Nah, it's still crazy. Now even Wataru

looks more godly, to be honest with ye.”

“I think that’s a sign of brain problems. You should probably get to bed early tonight.” I decided to ignore the fact that Gozou seemed to be on the verge of worshipping Wataru. “Give the Tsia family’s wagon back to them for me, alright?”

“Sure. And now that we have that settled, want to duel?”

“Hell no.”

In any case, Wataru and the others would be staying in the Dain estate. *I’m jealous, Rokuko and I are stuck in Haku’s villa. The pressure is going to shave years off my life.*

We got Niku and Ichika back in the party, and then it was time to get to work on Haku’s job. Our first order of business was discussing the Dungeon Battle, and to that end we were called to the capital’s central Adventurer’s Guild. Since Dungeon Battles and so on were top secret, our cover was me being given a personal quest now that I had reached B-Rank. That wasn’t really untrue, so there were no holes in our cover whatsoever. It being a private quest gave us an excuse not to tell anyone about it, too. There was no better way to prepare for the Dungeon Battle than to act like it was a quest.

All the members of our party, the Dancing Dolls (temporary name), passed through the door to the Guild and headed straight to the meeting room.

“Yo, Keima! It’s been a while!” Misha said. The summons to the guild had come from her, as far as the public was concerned anyway.

“Heya, Misha. I see you’re not asleep today.”

“I just got woken up. It was pawful, nyahaha.”

“That’s what I like to hear.”

We high-fived and shook hands, greeting each other like close friends. *Oooh, brother of my heart, oooh, comrade in arrrrms.*

“Where’s Haku?”

“Aaah, she should be here in a sec, probably. But the quest giver’s already here, so feel free to start your talk!”

“...The quest giver is a rabbit-type Core, right?”

“Yup. What of it?”

“Are they in human form?”

“Not right meow at least.”

“So in short, he’s a rabbit.”

“Whoops, don’t mind this drool!”

“Don’t eat the friggin’ quest giver,” I said as a joke, and Misha laughed in amusement. *Seriously, now I really want to know why a rabbit would jump into the den of carnivores that is Haku’s party for help.*

“Anyway, I’ll go get ‘im.” Misha left the room, then came right back. She was carrying a birdcage with an orange rabbit inside. *Yeaah, that’s a normal-sized rabbit. Yep.*

As soon as the rabbit saw Rokuko, it rose up a front paw in a greeting. "Hi Core 695, I mean, Rokuko! It's been a while!"

"Nice to see you again, Core 629. What are you doing in there?"

"Well, y'see, uh. It felt like this pink cat beastkin would eat me for sure if I didn't get in here, so... Ngh, I can feel her hunger from here..."

I glanced at Misha and saw that she was drooling. Hunger was something we all felt, but that didn't mean much to someone about to get eaten. I looked at Niku and saw she had hunter's eyes too. Even Ichika did. Her eyes said she was already imagining how this new breed of rabbit would taste.

"Seriously, you guys? Don't eat the quest giver."

"I know, I know, but my instincts are too strong! My soul hungers...!"

"This is the one thing I can agree with you on..." Niku said.

"I-I can hold back, dude! Just 'cause he's a new kind of rabbit doesn't mean he'll taste good for sure!"

Somehow, I can't imagine this Dungeon Battle going well. My own party might end up eating him before the Demon Realm ever comes at all.

"Eeeek! Help me, Rokuko! I don't wanna get eaten!"



“Okay everyone, that’s enough. Come back to your senses.”
Rokuko clapped her hands, and all the hunger faded from the room.
“Whew. Thanks a ton, Rokuko. I thought my heart was gonna stop from all the stress.”

“By the way, I heard rabbits can die from loneliness. Is that true?”
Rokuko asked.

“I’ve never died, so I dunno, but... Wait, is that your Dungeon Master over there?” The fluffy rabbit turned my way.

“Core 629, right? I’m Keima. Nice to meet you.”

“Aah! Haku... er, the mighty and gracious Haku told me you’d be coming for help. I’m counting on you, friend!”

It seemed like Core 629 wasn’t yet used to referring to Haku respectfully. *Makes sense. He joined her faction out of nowhere, and against his will at that.*

“By the way, Core numbers are a pain in the ass to say for me. Mind if I think up a nickname for you?”

“Hmm? Go ahead, friend. I would love a fantastic name!”

I glanced at Ichika. “Ichika, any ideas for a name?”

“Huh? You’re gonna let me take care of this one, my man?
Alrighty then... how about Mikan?” *Huh, looks like auto-translator left the Japanese word for orange there. Maybe because it’s a name? Either way, she must have thought of oranges thanks to his orange fur. I feel like it’s kind of cruel to name a rabbit after food, but... sure. Should be fine.*

“Well, you heard her. Sound good to you?”

“Uh-huh. Okay, feel free to call me Mikan!”

“.....”

“Hm? Is something on my face?”

“Nope, nothing. Don’t mind me.” *Seems like that didn’t turn Ichika into his Dungeon Master. That’s probably for the best, to be honest.* “By the way, Mikan, do you have a Dungeon Master?”

“Nopers.”

And yet she still didn’t become his Master. I’m glad I got the opportunity to experiment, but I still really don’t know what the conditions for becoming a Dungeon Master are. Giving them a name isn’t enough, apparently. Oh well. Not like figuring it out would mean much.

“...Alright, let’s talk business. Mikan, where’s your dungeon?” I asked.

“Oh, right. It’s part of a grassy plain!”

“A grassy plain, huh? What else is there?”

“Not much! Just us rabbits.”

So he was a rabbit-type Dungeon Core with a grassy plain dungeon that only had rabbits... *Yeah, nah, I’m gonna need some more details than that.*

“Where’s your Dungeon Core?”

“Heheh, this is actually a secret, but it’s in an underground cave. I had to dig a hole and hide it from hawks back in the day.”

“Can you summon monsters other than rabbits? What about traps?”

“Well, it’s like this...”

We discussed the basics while waiting for Haku to arrive.

“...So you really do only have rabbits, huh?”

“Yup! When someone falls inside, we surround him and beat the crap out of him! Each hit may be weak, but with enough of them they’ll eventually die! That beats almost everyone.”

“I get what you’re saying, but that strategy won’t be too useful in a Dungeon Battle.” *Yeah, I think I understand why Haku told me to “strike a blow” against the Demon Realm instead of “beat them.”* After all, it was a simple dungeon with a grassy plain on top and a single basement floor beneath it. Mikan’s [Rabbit Paradise] was so barebones it reminded me of Rokuko’s old [Ordinary Cave].

“So you can help me, right? I’m counting on you!” Mikan flapped his orange-colored rabbit ears in the bird cage. *God, they’re so fluffy.*

It was then that Haku suddenly appeared in the room out of nowhere. She was like a ninja appearing from thin air... *But she didn’t {Teleport}. That was just the Dungeon Menu’s place function.* The whole imperial capital is part of her dungeon territory, so yeah.

“Sorry for the wait. I see you’ve already begun your discussion.”

“Haku!” Rokuko went straight for Haku.

“Haku... Er, Lady Haku. I express my thanks once again for you, er, deciding to help me in my hour of need.”

“You have my sympathy, Core 629. There are few fates less fortunate than being targeted by the Demon King faction.”

“You got that right.” Mikan stomped his back feet against the ground. *Oh yeah, foot stomping. I think that’s what rabbits do when they’re stressed. I wonder what he’s stressed about here? The Demon King faction, or Haku being here. Oh, right, I should use this opportunity to ask what I was wondering about.*

“Hey, Mikan, how’d you even get here to ask Haku for help? Surely you didn’t just hop into the imperial capital. You would have been eaten alive.”

“Don’t even joke about that! Er, but well, I got captured by Haku... er, Lady Haku’s subordinates on my way to the capital. She probably noticed me the second I entered her territory, but er, I just bowed my head and asked for help.”

I kinda feel like rabbits have their head bowed by default, just physically speaking, but wow. He actually walked this way? I glanced at Haku, and she answered while hugging Rokuko.

“The Demon King faction Core sent me a message saying he was going to destroy one of my underlings. I sent some people to investigate what he was talking about and found Core 629 on the way there.”

“I found ‘im, meow! Sheesh, those Demon Realm guys sure like to jump to conclusions and stick to‘em, nyahaha!”

Misha found him, huh? And she didn't even eat him on the spot. Impressive. That deserves some high praise, I say.

“Uh-huh. They didn't listen to anything I said! Sniff... They found me while I was just rolling around and having a good time at home...!” Mikan stomped the ground again. *I feel you. I'd be pissed if someone got in the way of me rolling around in bed at home too.*

“By the way, is Mikan Core 629's name?”

“Yeah. I just can't get used to calling Cores by their numbers.”

“I see. So, did you become his Dungeon Master too?”

“Nooo?” *Can't say I'm surprised Haku saw through my experiment. Seems like Mikan didn't, though. He's just tilting his head in confusion right now.*

“Oh, so! What are we gonna do with my dungeon?”

“Hmmm, well. I believe I will donate some DP to Keima. I would like you two to work together to fight back the Demon King faction.”

“...You're just dumping all the work onto other people, huh?”

“It will be much more entertaining, ahem, much more effective if you handle all of this, Keima. I believe you would do a better job than I would.”

Yeah, she just said entertaining. I'm sure it's half for entertainment value and half to see more of my secret techniques, though.

“To this end, I will officially accept you into my faction, Mikan. I expect you to be grateful.”

“Y-Yes ma'am! Thank you so much! I owe you my life!” Mikan bowed his head. *I'll pretend I didn't see his back leg twitch and almost stomp the ground.*

“...By the way, how many Cores are in your faction anyway, Haku? I know Core 219 from Tsia's dungeon is in it, but that's about it.”

“Almost all Cores in the Laverio Empire belong to my faction. They just aren't as assertive about it as the Demon King faction and Dragon King faction tend to be.”

“...That's why they mistook me for a member of the Traitor faction.”

Oh wow, he just straight-up said Traitor there. But I guess that's fine, since he's officially a traitor too, now.

“Sniff. And I used to be part of the Beast King faction, too.”

“Oh yeah, I wanted to ask about that too. Who's the Beast King?”

“That’s Core 8’s faction,” Haku said, smoothly responding to the question I asked Mikan. “Most beast-type cores belong to his faction, but it is quite a dog-eat-dog world there. They are the type to throw children to the wolves to see if they are strong enough to survive.”

“...So in other words, they probably would have abandoned Mikan?”

“Awww...”

Honestly, I was starting to get pretty sympathetic for the cute little orange rabbit. *I’ve gotta do my part in this Dungeon Battle!*

“Well, that should be enough for our preliminary discussion. Shall we go to the dungeon itself?” Haku said before beginning to chant {Teleport}. She could use the dungeon’s placing function on herself and Misha, but not all of us.

We were enveloped in the light of teleportation, and when it faded we were on a grassy plain. A quick look around showed nothing but grass and more grass. *Don’t tell me this entire massive plain is Mikan’s dungeon. Or maybe this is just one of those rooms that looks super wide, but actually has walls?*

“Oh, my dungeon’s about fifty meters wide total. There’s an entrance hole to the underground floor somewhere around here... Oh, here! Here it is!” Mikan fluffily bounced over to a nearby patch of grass, which when moved aside showed a hole dug into the dark brown clay. There was an illusion spell cast over the staircase so enemies wouldn’t find it. *I see...*

“I would’ve fallen for sure if I didn’t know about this.”

“Eheheh! And that’s when we would beat you to death! I’ve got Horned Rabbits, Armored Rabbits, Wizard Rabbits, and Soldier Rabbits! Everyone, I’m hooome!”

The stairs down led first to a large room. There were rabbits that looked like armadillos there, and ones with horns. It was easy to guess they were the Armored Rabbits and Horned Rabbits. They were blowing air through their noses, which was apparently them saying “Welcome back.” *Does the auto-translator not speak rabbit?*

“Welcome baaack!”

“Didja bring back anything?”

“I wanna eat graaass.”

Oh, there it goes. I can understand what the three Horned Rabbits are saying. Damn... Now I’m gonna feel weird when eating rabbits from now on. Maybe I shouldn’t have tried using the auto-translator on them. Also, Niku, I see that tail wagging. Don’t hunt them, okay? No hunting.

“Nmm nmm. Ah, Keima. Our strategy here is to have these guys hold off the enemy while Wizard Rabbits and Soldier Rabbits rush over from that other room over there. There hasn’t been an adventurer yet that survived it! The strategy’s unbeatable!”

“Fascinating. But the Demon King faction guy survived, didn’t he?”

“...I stopped them since I noticed he was a Core. Though, erm, they probably would have all died if I hadn’t.” Mikan stomped the ground.

He knows his limits, at least. Though real talk, he probably only ever had to face newbie adventurers. Even D-Rankers in Tsia basically live off rabbit hunting, and not many of them are strong enough to survive a swarm of monsters ambushing them. It’s basically trial and error gameplay, except it’s real life so they die after one error.

Given that zero percent of adventurers survived and this was a dungeon that ate corpses for DP, his strategy actually was pretty effective. Despite its flaws, of course. *The one thing I can say for sure is that his dungeon’s a lot better than what Rokuko’s was when I first became her Dungeon Master.*

“Did you think of this strategy yourself?”

“One of the older rabbit-type Cores told me about it. He said even though we’re rabbits, we can win if we surround them and beat them up all at once.”

Oh, there are other rabbit-type cores. Neat.

My pointless musing was interrupted by Haku asking me a question while embracing Rokuko from behind in an enveloping hug. “So then, Keima. Do you think you’ll be able to sock it to that Demon King faction Core?”

“...I think I’ll need a little more information to say anything for sure. Like who we’re dealing with here, for example.”

“I see you’re not saying ‘no,’” Haku said with a soft smile. Rokuko lifted her head high and nodded with pride. *She complimented me there, y’know. Not you.*

So. We were dealing with Core 564. He wasn’t particularly significant in the Demon King faction. He was one batch above Rokuko, but he was small-time enough that he might even be below Rokuko on the Dungeon Core rankings.

Still, it was unlikely he would attack us with too many people at once. The Demon King faction valued individual strength and courage. Mikan was obviously weaker than him, so if he charged in and tried to win through overwhelming numbers he would be doing nothing but shaming himself.

With that in mind, Aidy had been viewing us as equals back when we fought in that triple-threat Dungeon Battle all that time ago. And judging by how she ultimately tried to win with her own strength and courage as a Dungeon Core, she was the shining example of a Demon King faction member.

“Now then. Anything else you would like to know?” Haku asked.

“Yeah. Just how far is this place from the imperial capital?”

“One day by horse, I would say. If you left in the morning you would just barely make it there by nightfall.”

...Hm. That's surprisingly close. I guess that's why newbies stumble upon this place.

“Wait, someone from the Demon King faction was that close to the capital?”

“He was surely on an infiltration mission. It's such a pain, really. They always do whatever they can to annoy me.”

Makes sense. Nooow then... I think I've figured out all the game pieces here. I've got a pretty good idea of how to proceed, too. I'm not sure if we really have a chance of winning, but we don't need to win. Feels bad to say this, but I'm not the one who's dying if we lose. Our victory condition is killing at least one Demon King faction Core, more or less, and Mikan surviving that is just a bonus. Though us winning would definitely be ideal.

...So, in short, this is the perfect opportunity to try out risky strategies I would never do if my life was on the line!

“So our funds are the 100,000 DP I got from Haku, and the 350,000 DP that Mikan has saved up.”

“Uh huh! But that's my life savings, so... I don't wanna use it all.”

Any of the 100,000 DP I got from Haku that we didn't use would go straight into our pocket. One could say it was our reward outside of the hugging rights. That and the fact she would help out where she could.

“Hmm. There's one thing I want to make sure of first, but could you pull some strings in the Adventurer's Guild and get word out about this dungeon, Haku? It doesn't have to be immediately, but the sooner the better.”

“That shouldn't be a problem. Misha, you know what to do.”

“Roger dodger!”

Alright, now we can lure adventurers here and get more DP. Which reminds me. Rokuko and I don't count, but Ichika and Niku should be sources of DP for him. If we add that into the budget, then... Perfect. Let's start with step one.

“Mikan. How about we move locations?”

“Wha?!” Mikan tilted his head in surprise. “What do you mean, move?”

“Make a sub-dungeon and move your Dungeon Core there.”

“Whoa... Now there's an idea.”

“By the way, that's the technique I used to beat Haku.”

“Guh?! Really?!” Mikan looked at Haku, who was giving a bemused smile as she remembered our first Dungeon Battle. “Wow...! Wait, hold on a second. You're saying that Rokuko beat Haku?”

“Eheheh, that's right. Though we were limited to 100,000 DP

each. Isn't my Keima just amazing?!"

"Holy cow! That's awesome, Rokuko!"

Indeed. This was the technique I'd used against Haku in my first Dungeon Battle. It wasn't even a sub-dungeon back then. I'd just put a Dummy Core in a distant cave, and Haku had ignored it entirely. And thus, I won.

If even Haku fell for it, there was no reason not to use it against other opponents too. That was why we would be placing the precious Dungeon Core in a safe, far-off location. Luckily, we were in the middle of some empty grassy plains. Burying the Dummy Core in an unmarked hole a good distance away, then swapping the real Dungeon Core for it on the day of the battle should keep us completely safe.

"So yeah, Haku. I want to make a sub-dungeon, but here's what I'm not sure about. Could we make the dungeon close to the imperial capital, maybe half a day's horse ride away from here?"

"So right in between here and the capital? Certainly, if it's not too big. Do as you like."

Making a sub-dungeon half a day's ride away should be within our budget if we made the territory line connecting the two dungeons very thin. She gave her permission, and that pretty much solved our defensive problems.

"Sheesh, Keima. You beat Lady Haku and you're coming up with ideas like this? You're really something else."

"What can I say, the special conditions helped me."

"...Actually, I've heard rumors that Rokuko beat Dungeon Core Number 112 in a fight too. Was that your work too, Keima?"

"Core 112... Oh, Ittetsu? Yeah, I only won thanks to some special conditions there too."

"Oh! Also, also! She beat Core 666 and the others in that big Dungeon Battle, right? Was that you too?"

"Yet another case of good circumstances."

"...Is it just me, or did I just get a reaaal hecking strong ally on my side?"

Maybe if you look at my wins out of context, sure. He'd probably go even more nuts if I told him I've "beaten" a dragon too. And anyway, if you want to talk about "real hecking strong allies," you got a much bigger one than me the second Haku put you under her protection.

"I'd kind of like a special win condition too. Mikan, could you contact them and try to negotiate for one? Like we win if we can protect the dungeon for a full day."

"Erm, I dunno. Not sure I have any way to contact him! We could wait for him to come back, but I thiiink he said the Dungeon Battle would start when he came back."

“That’s inconvenient... Wait, Haku. Could you contact them?”

“Let’s see... I could send a letter to Core 6. Shall I suggest that I want to discuss our subordinate Cores fighting a Dungeon Battle?”

Welp, Mikan, I hope you enjoy being in the center of a faction war. You have my sympathy... but wait, I guess I’m getting wrapped up in the same war. With that in mind, the more people I get involved with this, the more I can drag down with me if things get bad.

“...Well, whatever. Let’s just do what we can.”

“Yeah! I’m counting on you, Keima!” Mikan rubbed his fluffy, pudgy cheek against my leg. The three Horned Rabbits came over and did the same while expressing similar sentiments. Each was fluffier than the last. Never before had I felt such fluffiness.

I feel at peace... Ouch, but the horns are pretty dang hard. Kinda hurts to have those rubbed into me. Feels a bit like a love bite gone slightly too far. Oh, the Armored Rabbits are coming too? H-Hold on, you aren’t even fluffy! You’ve got hard scales! Don’t rub me, gaaah!

“Keima, you sure are covered in rabbits.”

“Want some, Rokuko? I’ll share. They’re hard as heck. And they have horns.”

“...Actually, I think I’ll just join you. Get ready, Keima!”

Hold on! Wait, Haku’s watching us! Oh, Niku. You can join, but don’t draw your knife. These are friends, not food.

* * *

Alright. Haku and Misha left ahead of us. That meant I could start modifying Mikan’s dungeon without holding back. But when I told him that, he gave an unhappy pout.

“Hrmph. My dungeon has a one hundred percent success rate, you know! I’m pretty proud of it!” He rolled his fluffy body on the table.

“There are good sides and bad sides to that, actually.”

“Really?”

His dungeon didn’t let a single beginner leave alive. There were positives to that, but significant negatives as well. No survivors meant that his dungeon never got a reputation. As the saying goes, the dead don’t talk (outside of the undead), and no reputation meant fewer invaders entering the dungeon.

“What’s bad about that?”

“You get less DP.”

“...Oooh, I see!” Mikan replied with a bounce of his tail.

You could certainly survive for a long time if no invaders came to your dungeon. No invaders meant no death. But at the same time, no invaders meant no DP being earned and no growth for your dungeon. *I shall name this phenomenon the Dungeon Dilemma. Not that I’ll ever say it again, though. Probably.*

“By the way, I told Haku we’re going to make a dungeon to move the core to, but I’m actually gonna make more than two of them.”

“Oh, okay! Do we have enough DP for that, though...?”

“Not right now, but hey, I’ll get you earning some stable DP. Pal... You’re gonna have a dungeon with a one hundred percent rate of survival. That’s why I secured some land closer to the capital.” A half day’s walk from the capital meant the adventurers could get to the dungeon and get home in a single day if they put in the leg work. That would lead to more repeat visits.

“A survival rate of one hundred percent? How’s that gonna earn DP? We get some from the ground, but other than that you have to kill to get it.”

“What, you don’t know? You get DP as long as they’re inside your dungeon, even if you don’t kill them.”

“...Um. Wait, really?”

Wow. He actually didn’t know.

“Ichika and Niku over there should be earning some decent DP just by existing. Take a look.”

“Let’s see here... Wow! You’re right!”

He must have checked the menu. Some of their daily DP should already have entered in stock. *Still, I thought for sure that it was common knowledge among Dungeon Cores that invaders staying in the dungeon earned DP. Was I wrong about that...? Don’t tell me there are some other ways to earn DP that Rokuko doesn’t know about... Eh. I’ll investigate that later.*

“Neat! I didn’t know you could earn DP this way. I’ve learned a lot.”

“Good to hear that.”

“So, in a one hundred percent survival rate dungeon, do you just, umm... capture humans and imprison them inside?”

Some dungeons did that. They had enormous human farms earning a ton of DP. But we wouldn’t be going that far.

“Nah, we don’t need to lock them up. We can just make a store.”

“...A store?”

“Hold on, Keima. Are you suggesting he sells things to humans like our dungeon? Can Core 629 even morph into human form?” Rokuko interjected, having previously been poking rabbits while listening. Her point was a fair one.

“Aww... I dunno about selling things. I can’t morph into human form. I mean, I could if I tried hard, but it would cost 300,000 DP!”

Human form was a kind of status among Dungeon Cores. Reason being, their Father looked like a human, and to pay their respects to him the veteran Cores all learned to morph into human form. Apparently that led to a lot of them feeling jealous toward human-

type Dungeon Cores like Rokuko and Haku that didn't need to bother with morphing at all. *300,000 DP, huh? That would knock out most of Mikan's life savings in a second.*

"Nah, I don't think you would stand much to gain from having a human form."

"I've never done it before, either!"

Mikan just didn't have the leeway to spend 300,000 DP on something like that. That was the long and short of it. *Should be safe to just think of it as a tithe for paying respects to Father.*

"But a store that sells things to humans will definitely need employees that can pass off for humans. I recommend a Silky."

"Nmm, hold on a second. I dunno if I've seen any of those." Mikan's eyes began sliding across the empty air. He was probably using the menu to look at the catalog. "Nope, no Silkies! How about Soldier Rabbits? They can stand, walk, and use weapons too! The only problem is they can't speak human language."

"Ichika, your thoughts?"

"My man, if they can't talk, we won't even be able to pass 'em off as rabbit beastkin. That's gonna be a no from me."

Yeaah, they might be bipedal with spears and all, but they're still basically rabbits. That's pushing a bit too far.

"Could you make the catalog visible for me? I want to see what options we have."

"Okie dokie!" Mikan waved his hands through the air, and the menu popped up out of nowhere. The catalog was open. *Alright, the UI looks like what I'm used to. Let's see here... Right, right. I see. The rabbits are the cheapest monsters, and pretty much all his choices are rabbits. For some reason the pitfall trap is extremely cheap. Huh, all his items are just basic materials.*

Weeell, that makes sense when you think about it. Rokuko and Mikan are just fundamentally different Cores. Of course they'll have different options. That said, worst case scenario, I can just buy monsters and items myself, then transfer them over to Mikan. This shouldn't be a big problem for us. Oh, I wonder if he'll get Silkies and other monsters if he unlocks human form. That would make sense.

"Oh, this War Rabbit looks pretty good. Misha's a War Cat I think, so War Rabbits should be able to morph into human form."

"...50,000 DP... That's kinda intimidating!"

On the other hand, my catalog didn't have War Rabbits. It was hard to call 50,000 DP especially cheap, and from Mikan's perspective it was a full seventh of his life savings. A significant price to be sure, but a necessary one.

"Try buying one. I'll cover the costs if it ends up not working out."

"Ngggh, alright, I'll try it. Eeek, this is so nerve-wracking! I've

never bought anything over 10,000 DP before, much less 50,000 DP...!"

"At times like these, it's best to just work fast and get it over with. C'mon, c'mon."

"Ngggh! I'm gonna make sure you pay for it if this doesn't work, okay?!" Mikan complained before starting to summon the War Beast. A magic circle with a diameter of about one meter swooshed out in front of us. Out popped a rabbit-eared girl with red fur. Mikan had floppy ears that fell to the ground, but this girl had pointy ears that shot up like a bunny girl's. *Also, she's mostly covered in fur, and even though she's not wearing anything it looks like she's wearing a one-piece swimsuit. Her hands and feet have what looks like fur gloves and fur boots, starting at her elbows and knees.*

"Oooh, she came out just like the other rabbits...! It's a human-shaped rabbit...!"

"...Erm, um! N-Nice to meet you!"

"SHE TAAALKED! She talked in human language! Wooow!"

Man, this takes me back. I reacted the same way when I summoned Rei and the others. Aaand I'll just keep it to myself that a talking rabbit like Mikan is a lot more impressive to me than a talking human-rabbit.

"She's super cute, isn't she?" Rokuko said. "I think she passes, Keima."

"Yeah. Honestly, I could use someone like her as a receptionist at our inn." *She had a cute enough face that even if she couldn't transform into a human, we could probably trick people just by putting some clothes on her. Honestly, I could imagine there being some beastkin out there that looked more like rabbits than her.*

Aaand I was staring at her while thinking, which made her blush and hide her face with embarrassment. *Whoops, my bad.*

"Mikan, give her a name. Something cute and girly, preferably."

"Wha? Oh, you want to make her a Named monster! Well, that makes sense for a 50,000 DP monster... Nmmm, maybe Bloodpool... Nah, that's not cute enough."

Holy shit, that's a scary name. What kind of naming sense does this rabbit have?

Mikan lifted his head and looked at Ichika. "Hey, you there. Human that named me. Could you think of a name for her too? I don't really know what kinda name human girls have, so yeah! All eyes on you!"

"What, are you for real? Alright... How about Ichigo? She's red and stuff, so yeah."

"Sweet! Okaaay, your name is now Ichigo! Looking forward to working with you!"

"R-Right! Thank, um, thank you!"

What's with Ichika's naming sense? That one means strawberry. She sure loves to name people slash rabbits after food. Not that I mind, since Ichigo is girly and cute.

"So, how far does your human morphing go?"

"Ichigo! Now's your time to shine! Show them your power!"

"Um... Nmm, fwaaah!" Ichigo stomped her foot with both hands forming fists to hide her mouth as part of her human transformation sequence. Her ears remained the same, but the fur on her extremities and body disappeared, resulting in a completely normal hu— *Whoa, whoa, whoa, put on some clothes! Wait, you don't have any?! I guess rabbits are just used to being naked.* I turned away and avoided looking at Ichigo's nude body.

"R-Rokuko. Get some clothes for her."

"...Keima, you pervert."

"Come on! Don't give me crap for this."

Incidentally, we ended up buying the clothes for her. *What can I say, Mikan's catalog didn't have any clothes in it.*

"So, what kind of store are you thinking of, Keima? A stand for rabbit meat kebabs?"

"Bwguuuuh?! I-I don't wanna sell the meat of my friends! We could have an infinite amount of them through Spawners, but I mean..."

"Yeah, don't worry. It'll be a rabbit business, but not one that sells meat. Let me explain..." And so I did.

The theme for the dungeon would be a place of healing. A true paradise in the opposite sense of what the current Rabbit Paradise was like.

People would come to dote on rabbits and be comforted. An oasis in the midst of a society built on stress. The appeal would form an addiction that drew regular customers here to empty their pockets, while dragging along their friends through the power of communication and peer pressure. This was something that only a small animal Core could do. Something only Mikan as a rabbit-type Core could do... Okay, maybe not, but it was hard to imagine anyone being more suited for it than him.

"...So yeah, this is gonna be a store that sells the cuteness of rabbits to heal others. It'll be a rabbit cafe."

"Cuteness! Okay, I'm confident in cuteness. I've never missed a day of grooming!" Mikan said while striking a coquettish pose. We all ignored him and kept talking.

"...So, uh, by cafe you mean like, serving food and stuff, right?" Ichika asked. Her question was reasonable. And honestly, it wasn't even a bad idea, but well...

"I think that would be asking too much from these rabbits. Worst

case scenario, we drop the cafe entirely. The important thing here is our customers self-healing by spending time with cute rabbits. We'll earn DP the more time they spend cuddling. It's a win-win. Might even be simpler to just call this a Comfy Zoo or something. What do you think?"

"I dunno, there aren't any rare animals here... Not much of a zoo. Should I buy some monsters too?"

Oh right, rabbits are pretty common in this world, unlike in Japan. They'd be like sparrows or ravens in Japan. Common wild animals that aren't worth paying to see. We might need to train them up like turning a stray cat into a professional cat cafe employee...

"Mmm, I'm gonna be honest bros, it might work for rich people who're used to having pets, but I dunno about adventurers. They'd just think of the rabbits as food, not gonna lie."

Yeah, I had the same thought. Misha was a special case, but Niku and Ichika both drooled at the sight of Mikan back when we first met.

"But you know, I think it'll be fine."

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"Take a look at that, over there." I pointed, and there was Rokuko and Niku playing with the Horned Rabbits. Cute lolis surrounded by fluffy rabbits. A combination of cute and cute that could not be beaten. Niku had been thinking of rabbits as meat not an hour ago, and there she was, rolling around with them. Even Rokuko with her filthy goblin fetish was having fun with them.

"...Dude... Now that I've seen Niku like this, I feel like there's no way this won't succeed."

"Yep. But the first step to success is getting people to look at rabbits not as meat, but as cute animals. And the impetus for that will be Ichigo."

"Eep?! Me?" Ichigo the War Rabbit twitched with fear when I shifted the context to her direction.

"Oh, so you want to have Ichigo be a store employee?"

"That's basically what I mean. We could have her live here, but first things first she'll want to register as an adventurer. Once that's done, she'll come here with teams of adventurers checking out our new rabbit dungeon and guide them into loving rabbits."

"...Alright, dude, I got it! In fighting terms that's like baiting them into liking rabbits!"

In more modern terms, it's like a skill manipulating buyers.

"But I dunno if newbie adventurers are gonna be all about taking investigation quests for new dungeons... Oh, wait. We can totes just get Misha's help here."

"Yup, that's right. We'll get her a C-Rank in the Adventurer's Guild or something. Misha already said she'd help and everything, so

yeah.” *Sure is nice to have friends in powerful places at times like this. Authority makes everything go smoother.*

“I-I wonder if I’m ready for such a big job,” Ichigo stammered.

“...I think I’ll go with you. Or rather, it might actually be smart to have one or two outsiders tag along. We can train together, make an excuse to talk to people, and then lead into joining a party.”

“I think I might be able to manage, then,” Ichigo said with a sigh of relief.

“Alright. Let’s get you dressed in an adventurer outfit. Ichika, work with Rokuko to get the clothes and equipment picked out.”

“You got it, man. I’m gonna make her the cutest adventurer to ever live!”

Man, Ichika sure is a lifesaver. I feel like she’s the most normal person in our entire dungeon. Rokuko and I are out of the running for being normal, Niku had too fucked up a childhood to know what normal is, and the monster girls are too biased for the dungeon to think about things normally. I can always count on Ichika to be there when I need some normal folk advice.

...But y’know, what’s it say about our dungeon if a slave that lost her freedom due to a gambling debt has the most common sense? Never mind. No point thinking about that too hard.

“Well, anyway. Let’s get to work on the dungeon, Mikan.”

“Yeah, sounds good! Where do we start?”

“Simple. Follow me.”

And so, we got to work making a new dungeon. But really, we finished in no time since there wasn’t actually that much stuff to make.

* * *

We had Misha post a quest for exploring a dungeon.

“Exploration Quest For a Newfound Dungeon. Recruiting two party members. C-Rank or above. Reward: Fifty coppers. Notes: Will be accompanied by the one who found the dungeon.”

Ichigo the newbie adventurer War Rabbit had found it, and since I was filling the space of one party member, it was in practice a quest for just one person. We settled on giving Ichigo a D-Rank. I figured that fifty coppers would be a bit cheap for a day’s work, but according to Misha, it was the perfect price to attract some do-gooder nice guys.

So, the guy who ended up coming to help was Tokoi the B-Rank adventurer of all people. Indeed, I had seen him before. We briefly crossed paths back when I last came to the imperial capital. If I remembered correctly, despite his scars and hard expression, he was a nice guy that liked to look after kids. He was helping with this dungeon investigation because, to quote, “Better a veteran like me

checks the place before any newbies hurt themselves.” A nice guy inside.

“Heya. I’m Tokoi.”

“N-Nice, um, nice to meet you...! I-I’m Ichigo.”

“Hi. I’m Kegirl.” In order to hide my identity, I was using {Ultra Transformation} to transform into a random woman. I couldn’t transform into something that didn’t exist, so I thought of someone I had seen back in Japan and tried transforming into them as an experiment. It was a success, obviously. And her hair was dyed brown.

By the way, I transformed into a woman exclusively since it would be easier to back Ichigo up that way. I had no other motivations. Especially since my Wearable Golem made most bodies equivalently strong.

...So yeah, this is a perfect disguise that literally nobody in the world will recognize. Nobody knows this person, and while I do feel awkward about borrowing her body without permission, I’m fully willing to accept the consequences if she comes to complain. By which I mean I’ll transform into someone else if she does. Good talk.

Incidentally, I had Misha give this identity a temporary C-Rank pass. Both it and this identity would fade away once I was done using them. *Woohoo! Spy stuff.*

“Is this your first time investigating a new dungeon?” he said gruffly, his scarred face bent into a resting frown. Ichigo froze in pure terror. That was my signal to respond in her place.

“Yeah, pretty much. What about you, Tokoi?”

“I’ve been through more than I can count. But dungeons are unique. Each is different. Nobody knows what danger might be lurking in this new one—don’t let your guards down, no matter what.” He was saying something incredibly kind and considerate, but due to his scary face it sounded like he was threatening to murder us if we held him back. Maybe that was just my imagination? Probably not, given how Ichigo was pretty terrified. *That’s some good acting considering she knows she’s no in danger... Wait, you’re just scared of Tokoi’s face? I can’t blame you.*

We discussed dungeons and such on the carriage ride there, and eventually we arrived at the new dungeon known as the [Rabbit Rest Spot]. By which I meant, known by us and nobody else yet.

“For a second I thought it impossible for a dungeon so close to the capital to go undiscovered, but huh. This place is so sparse looking I get it now,” Tokoi said as he looked at the dungeon entrance. It was a plain staircase with a handwoven grass cover on top of it, marked only by a single sign. The sign said “There are cute rabbits here. Please be nice to them.”

“...Whaddaya you two think about that? Some kinda riddle?”

Tokoi asked with furrowed brows.

“Let’s ask the discoverer. Ichigo, your thoughts?”

“Bwghiiih?! Um, um... I-I think it means, there are cute rabbits, and we should be nice to them!”

Yeah, she’s still shaking hard in pure terror. Good thing I came along.

“It looks like there’s a staircase beneath the cover. Let’s go inside.”

“Yeah. Be real careful. Might be traps down there.”

“Of course. I’ll take the lead. Could you guard our backs, Tokoi?”

We traveled down the stairs carefully with me in the lead, Ichigo following, and Tokoi trailing at the end. He was being so cautious that he tapped the walls and stairs as we walked.

“Hm. Seems like this is a pretty new dungeon.”

“Whoa, you can tell?”

“It’s a clay staircase, but there’s no chips broken off it at all. Old dungeons or well-traveled ones have kinda rounded staircases from all the walking. Plus, there’s no moss or dust even though it’s damp. All of these are signs of a new dungeon.”

Nice, that’s all good to know. Tokoi’s B-Rank isn’t just for show, unlike mine. He’s got actual experience on a deep level.

“Here, we’re in a room. There... don’t seem to be any traps. It’s actually a grass plains environment room. Oh, and it looks like it’s a Safe Zone.”

“A Safe Zone environment room right on the first floor? It’s like the dungeon’s being kind and telling us to rest here.”

Yeah, that’s the idea. Too bad I can’t confirm it for him. Oh, and environment rooms are rooms that feel like you’ve been taken to another world once you enter them. For example, it’s suddenly a desert, or a jungle, and so on. We have some in our dungeon too, and in Mikan’s words there was a [Grassy Plains] option right at the top. It was pretty cheap, too, especially with the Safe Zone set. Probably since there was nothing but grassy plains all around the dungeon.

“Ah!!! U-Um, loooooo, wow! There’s soooo many cute rabbits...!” Ichigo said awkwardly while stiffly walking into the room. She then started to walk toward the normal white rabbits... only for Tokoi to grab her by the back of the neck.

“Ngh?! U-Um, but why?!”

“Be more careful, idiot! There can be traps in Safe Zones too!”

“Eeek! I-I’m sorry! I’m so sorryyy!”

“Er, uh, I didn’t mean to make you cry! Forgive me!”

While Ichigo was busy crying at Tokoi in fear, I stepped further into the room while pretending to be cautious. I then sat on a random rock, or rather, one I had intentionally placed there to use as a seat earlier.

“Seems like it’s safe, Tokoi. Let’s take a rest so Ichigo can

recover.”

“R-Right. Sounds good.”

Seems like the nice guy Tokoi is weak to girls' tears. I'd expect nothing less from Misha's personal recommendation.

“Ngh, sniff!” Ichigo cried, and up walked white and fluffy rabbits to her. They rubbed their bodies against hers and flared their little nostrils, as if asking her what was wrong and trying to cheer her up. “Aww... Thank you, everyooooone...!”

“Those are some friendly rabbits,” I said.

“Yeah, maybe cause nobody's come here before? They've got some nice fur. And they look meaty, too. They'll fetch a high pr—”

“No! You can't hunt them! It's wrooong!” Ichigo stood in front of the rabbits protectively. She had an almost hysterical look on her face. It was clear she would do anything to protect them, and Tokoi picked up on that.

“...Alright, I won't touch 'em. The sign out there did say to be nice to them, so yeah.”

“That's right! You have to be friendly with the rabbits here!”

“Yeah. But I'll leave that to you and Kegirl. Don't think they'll like me too much. I'm a tough guy and all,” Tokoi said before sitting kinda sadly on a large rock.

But that's when a single rabbit hopped his way. It was one that had been hiding behind Ichigo. For a second he stared at Tokoi, but then he somewhat hesitantly began rubbing his body against him.

“...Wha?” Tokoi faltered, but took care not to move at all so as to not startle the rabbit.

“Friendly rabbits, aren't they?” I said.

“Y-Yeah. They sure are... They sure are.”

From then on, Tokoi said no more about fur and meat. He just reached out and gently stroked the rabbit's head. The rabbit shut its eyes and sniffed Tokoi's hand happily. That surprised Tokoi enough that he paused, but the rabbit tilted its head as if disappointed and started rubbing its head against his hand.

Tokoi furrowed his brows a little at the rabbit's attack, uncertain of what to do. Then Ichigo called out to him, with a bunch of rabbits in her arms.

“U-Um, Tokoi. You should, um, rub his back. Rabbits, ummm, really calm down when you do that.”

“Yeah? You sure know a lot, Ichigo.” Tokoi followed Ichigo's advice and began gently stroking the rabbit's back. The rabbit sat obediently down and let itself get rubbed. Eventually, the hard frown faded from Tokoi's face, replaced with a natural smile.

Ladies and gentlemen, we got him. I felt myself grin a little.

And by the way, the rabbits were of course being controlled by

Mikan and the others. They were using the original dungeon's monster control function to control monsters spawned from a [Monster Spawner: White Rabbits (500 DP)]. They had worked hard under the tutelage of Ichika to learn how to expertly make the rabbits act sweet and comforting.

Adventurers often lived off hunting animals, which gave few opportunities for animals to warm up to them. The strong animals of a tamer partner were one thing, but a weak animal like a rabbit? No. They never had the chance to just sit and relax with each other.

In other words, adventurers had no resistance whatsoever to cute little animals showing them love. It would calm them right now. Especially guys like Tokoi that scare people off with their tough looks.

Honestly, it took a lot more time to get used to controlling the rabbits to be cute than it did to make the dungeon. But looking at Tokoi's face told me that time was worth it. There was no longer any doubt in my mind. This was a battle we could win.

We had taken down Tokoi. With a B-Ranker famous throughout the imperial capital like him on our side, we could get a flood of customers coming through here. *Hell yeah, Misha. You gave us the best person we could ask for.*

"But seriously, this is some good fur. They don't smell at all like wild animals, either... They're like the pets of nobles or somethin'," Tokoi said as he rubbed the rabbit's entire back, impressed.

"Yeah. I feel like normal rabbits are fatter, or smell worse."

"Right. I get the feelin' that... yeah, that someone's looking after them."

Those are some nice instincts. Truly, a sharp mind befitting a B-Rank adventurer. No point trying to hide what's obvious. I'll tell him what's going on here. Hiding the fact we made the dungeon itself, of course.

I leaned over and muttered into Tokoi's ears. "The truth is, the person who found this dungeon—that is, Ichigo over here, has actually been coming here for a while. She likes to wash the rabbits, brush them, and so on."

"...Oh yeah?"

"She feels a connection with the rabbits, maybe 'cause she's a rabbit beastkin."

"I have heard beastkin can feel connections to animals close to their kind, but... Huh. Didn't expect Ichigo to be like that." Tokoi nodded. "Makes sense. That explains why she was acting so unnatural when we came inside the room."

"Yup. She told me she's actually camped in here several times already."

"...What's her goal?"

"She wants to save the rabbits from being hunted. What's your

thoughts on that, Tokoi?”

“Hrm...” Tokoi looked sharply at Ichigo and her rabbits. He was observing her, and he had good instincts. I broke out into a cold sweat, worried that a real deal B-Rank adventurer might see through our plot.

...But then, he nodded. “I think we can believe her. Ichigo loves these rabbits from the bottom of her heart... And I know how she feels. I know it well. If she wants to protect them, I’ll do what I can to help.”

Ah, right. Having good instincts doesn’t mean much when your heart’s been stolen by cute rabbits. He was stroking a rabbit on his lap while we talked, after all.

“Still, Kegirl, when’d you hear all that from Ichigo?”

“I met her before you showed up. I’m sure she felt more comfortable talking to me about it since we’re both girls. Also... Maybe she was worried that men wouldn’t show rabbits any love?”

“Yeah... I get that.” Tokoi nodded with a bitter frown. He must have remembered how much he scared Ichigo a second ago. “But there’s gonna be problems. The second this place opens up to the public, there’s gonna be ruffians coming to hunt the rabbits. No doubt about it,” Tokoi said, and the rabbit on his lap perked up. “Whoa there. My bad, didn’t mean to leak out killing intent like that. I just imagined those punks, and yeah.” Tokoi stroked the rabbit again. It nestled back down, calm again.

“I hear they’re cowardly, but I guess they can sense killing intent?”

“Yeah, small animals are sensitive to that kinda thing. Mice can actually sense death in the air and jump outta sinking ships, y’know. But this little guy’s pretty brave...” Tokoi murmured while stroking the rabbit squatting in front of him.

Incidentally, as far as we of the dungeon were concerned, people hunting the rabbits wasn’t really a problem at all. After all, the white rabbits were ultimately just spawned monsters being controlled by Mikan and the others. We were brushing and washing them a little to make them look cleaner, but in the end they were still cheap white rabbits that ran us 5 DP each. They could be replaced an infinite amount of times as long as the people... er, rabbits inside of them were safe. Seriously, thanks to the Spawner, people could hunt them constantly and it would be no skin off our back.

Therefore, as long as there were a couple friendly adventurers that came here often, a little hunting wouldn’t pose any problems. Though just to be safe, I did have pitfalls set up across the entire floor in case any rabbits died. They’d open the second a rabbit died, and it led down to a cold pond filled with icy water. They probably wouldn’t die

from the fall, but well. The only exit was to climb back up, so they'd probably freeze to death while wading in the shoulders-deep water. Escaping would be easy if they could fly, but nobody who could do that would be going out of their way to hunt rabbits.

"You couldn't say something to them?"

"Well, most nobody in the imperial capital will hunt them if I put word out not to, but I know a lot of guys who won't be able to hold back if they see cute rabbits like these. Not to mention adventurers from outside the capital might just wander in and do who knows what."

"...Uh huh." *Wow. I didn't even consider adventurers getting mindbroken by the cute rabbits and stealing them to take home. Stronger adventurers might actually manage to rabbit-nap them.*

Okay, if someone starts taking a rabbit away we'll have the rabbit flail like hell, make a dying noise at the stairs, and worse case scenario cut off the controls and make them play dead for as long as it takes. The rabbits here were free, anyway, and without being directly controlled they could only follow the simplest of orders. I heard that spawned monsters die in no time outside of dungeons anyway. If anyone tried stealing a rabbit here due to finding them so cute, they'd end up traumatized. Ahaha.

"Heeey, Ichigo. Could you come here for a second?"

"U-Um, yes? What is it, Kegirl?"

"Sorry, I told Tokoi that you've camped here before."

"Eep! Ah, um, I... You said you wouldn't say anythiiiiing..." Ichigo started floundering suspiciously. That was supposed to be acting, but it seemed actually sincere to me. Like she was nervous after having the conversation thrown her way.

"Ichigo. Did you ever have any problems camping here?"

"Eeeek! Ah, I, um, n-no! It gets dark at night, and there's safe sources of water, so... And even without a sleeping bag, it's warm with all the rabbits snuggling against you, so."

"Whoa! This place has it all, huh?" Tokoi reflexively tried standing up with excitement after hearing about rabbits snuggling against her at night. He didn't actually stand up, though. There was a rabbit on his lap.

"Alright then," he continued. "Let's camp here for tonight. We should investigate a bit further inside, but either way, we'll spend the night here as planned. I did say we may spend two nights here depending on the circumstances, so keep that in mind."

Yeah, we're gonna be staying here two nights. No doubt about it.

And by the way, there was nothing further inside the dungeon but a bunch of small rooms, one of which was the Core Room. The investigation ended quickly.

“This is, uh, a lot safer of a dungeon than I thought. There might be something more to this than we think. Let’s spend two nights here just to be safe. The pay’s the same, but I think it’s worth it. What about you two?”

“It’s fine with us. Right, Ichigo?”

“Yes! Tokoi, please oh please make friends with the rabbits!”

And yeah, Tokoi sure was trembling with anticipation of spending more time with the cute ol’ rabbits. Things were looking good for us. Though, to be clear, there definitely was more to the dungeon than he thought, and it was dangerous. After all, this was a DP earning spot we made to prepare for a Dungeon Battle.

That night, I successfully split up from Tokoi with the excuse that girls should sleep in different tents from boys. I then canceled my {Ultra Transformation}, went to the back of the dungeon, and {Teleported} to the original dungeon, at which point an orange rabbit jumped into my arms.

“Uwooooh, Keimaaa! You’re heckin amaziing! The DP is just pouring in!”

“Yeah? Good to hear.”

“Grasshoppers are a total waste of time!”

Basically all the DP we used to make the dungeon came from Mikan. But overall, it wasn’t that much. Probably about 20,000 total if you included the 5,000 DP Dummy Core.

Mikan couldn’t see the exact DP per day invaders earned yet, but Tokoi was unmistakably a powerful warrior. He would no doubt be earning a lot of DP by staying here overnight, not to mention the bonus he was getting from Ichika and Niku.

“Hold it right there, Core 629! Keima’s my Dungeon Master, I get to hug him first!”

“What’s the big deal? You can just join in, Rokuko.”

By the way, the big environment room with all the rabbits bouncing around was actually a massive jail room with exits and entrances. It was a Safe Zone and a jail. Since the exits shut during the night, all the adventurers inside earned six times as much DP as normal—three from being in a jail, and two from being shut inside.

At the moment Tokoi was the only person in the room, but considering Mikan had only ever hunted grasshoppers for DP before, it was quite a lot. Though he actually earned a lot more than we did from the earth. We got 10 DP a day back at the start, but he earned a lot more than that. *And really, I’m surprised grasshoppers earn any DP at all. Maybe I should start breeding locusts... or maybe this is just another of Mikan’s special traits, and I should be more careful. Better safe than sorry, I think.*

“That guy’s something else!” a rabbit exclaimed.

“He’s good at stroking us!”

“You could learn from him, Keima!”

The three Horned Rabbit brothers were fluffily looking this way while controlling the White Rabbits. They shut their eyes and went limp on the ground before I could reply, probably having returned to controlling the rabbits. They were manipulating the monsters with a kind of possession that left your actual body exposed. The possession let you move the monster’s body like your own, but in exchange, you couldn’t move your own body. You also had to have access to the menu to use it—in other words, Niku and Ichika couldn’t do it since they weren’t technically members of the dungeon.

“Okay! Should we move on to the next step yet?” Mikan asked while nibbling on his ear. The next step he was talking about was something we had prepared for the Dungeon Battle.

“Nah, no point until there’s a few more customers. I think two or three at the very least.”

“Okay, we won’t use it this time. The Soldier Rabbits have to sit this one out!”

“They’re gonna be pretty busy when the time comes, though. The more training they get done now, the better.”

“Yeah, it’s kinda hard to get used to attacking your allies!”

Indeed. My plan for this dungeon battle was to have our customers defend us. I would be using the strategy I cooked up when fighting the triple threat Dungeon Battle with Haku, but ultimately shelved—using adventurers as a defense force. By a twist of fate, Tokoi was my most likely candidate then, and now he’s leading the charge. I shelved the plan for a lot of reasons, but in the end our objective here was to land a blow against the Demon King faction, not necessarily win. I wasn’t sure if this strategy would work, but now I had the perfect opportunity to test it out.

The setup was simple. We would summon monsters to attack the rabbits, with a gimmick that the Safe Zone would shut down temporarily in the process. The adventurers inside would be trained to *protect the rabbits* whether they realized it or not. There was nothing odd about the rabbits being attacked. It happened all the time in this dungeon, and it followed that fighting to protect them was normal. That logic would still work even when the actual Dungeon Battle happened. They would fight off the invaders to *protect the rabbits*.

...It would be a bit much to expect them to keep fighting for no reward, so we would probably have the rabbits offer up a gift to the adventurers that fought the hardest.

At the moment all that would just be stirring up problems on purpose, but it would become the real deal on the day of the Dungeon Battle. I would want all the kindly adventurers hanging out in the

dungeon on that day to fight on the defensive line for us. As for the offensive line, well... I would have to learn more about our opponent before I could say anything for sure about that.

"That reminds me. We still don't really know much about who we're dealing with here, do we?"

"My sister hasn't said anything yet."

Days had passed since we asked Haku to contact the Demon Realm, but we had heard nothing from her since. Maybe communication between the opposing factions was abnormally slow. No doubt they performed an enormous number of tests on any letter before opening it, just in case it was trapped.

"Oh. I just remembered! He came to my dungeon in human form, but he was definitely a demon-type Core!"

"What, you could tell?"

"I think so! He was in human form, but he grew wings and goat horns. I think he was just hiding those. And an actual goat would be in the Beast King faction!" Mikan put a proud hand on his chin and sniffed his nose confidently. He was pretty good at giving smug looks for a rabbit.

But partial human transformation, eh? If Mikan's right about this, he's probably a demon-type Core. That sounds reasonable to me. Where else would a demon-type Core be but in the Demon King faction?

"Couldn't you have said something about that earlier?"

"The thought just hit me! I was so nervous in front of Haku it just didn't come to mind. But now, thanks to you, I'm all relaxed again!"

"Good to hear." I wonder if holy water does a ton of damage to demon-type monsters and stuff. I get the feeling that Beddhist holy water sure wouldn't.

My thoughts were interrupted by Rokuko remembering something herself. "Core 629, what about the gathering? I'm going to go, but what about you?"

"Gathering? Hold on, Rokuko, what're you talking about?" I asked before Mikan could reply.

"Oh? I didn't mention it to you, Keima? The yearly Dungeon Core gathering is coming up soon."

"...Riiight. It is that time of year. And no, you didn't mention it to me."

"Didn't I? Last year?"

"Pretty sure that's long enough ago that it doesn't count."

"Then I just did mention it. All good."

She did mention that there was a gathering of Dungeon Cores every year, and I remembered a lot about it since the last gathering ended up with that triple threat Dungeon Battle. *So, what... A whole year's passed since then? Wow.*

“Of course I’m gonna go too! I don’t actually wanna go, but he might reissue the challenge there, and who knows what he’ll do if I don’t go...”

“Interesting. So, when is the date exactly, Rokuko?”

“Pretty soon, I think.”

“No, I mean, the date.”

“Oh, it’s today,” Rokuko said right as her body began to shine. Mikan’s was shining too.

Are you kidding me? Did this seriously happen AGAIN?

“Don’t try to cheat on me, Keima. I told Ichika to watch you for me, okay?”

“Welp, Keima. I’ve gotta go! Look after Ichigo and the dungeon for me!”

“Come on! Tell me about this stuff ahead of time!” I yelled as Rokuko and Mikan vanished in a flash of light before our eyes.

Side Chapter — Meanwhile at the [Cave of Greed]

Rei was entrusted with the dungeon while Keima and the others were gone. But in reality, the only difference was that with a few people gone they were just a bit busier than normal.

You might wonder if Gozou not being around to keep the adventurers in order would cause problems, but Wozma the vice chief was taking care of that. Or really, the celebratory mood inspired by Gozou and Keima reaching B-Rank was still going strong, and nobody was enough of a jerk to go out of their way to cause problems. The continued fervor made Rei want to celebrate the widespread fame and popularity of her Master.

All the monster girls were used to the town being busy and celebratory thanks to the lasting impact of the dragon incident. The fact that the Silkies could split infinite times to keep working was one big reason for the work staying manageable. Not to mention that Elulu the ghost could keep the dungeon itself running twenty-four seven since she didn't need sleep.

So yeah, they were busy, but the three core monster girls—Rei, Neruneh, and Kinue—had more than enough time to take plenty of breaks.

“...Sigh. Yet another day of no problems, even though Master, Rokuko, Niku, and Ichika are all gone...”

“Isn't that a good thiiiing?”

Within the employee break room, Rei had her feet shoved underneath the kotatsu with her squishy cheek pressed against the wooden top. Neruneh had been there since before her, and was drinking some of Kinue's green tea while casually fiddling with multicolored balls.

The kotatsu didn't have its heat on, but it was still comfy. A thin sheet was perfect for the weather they were in.

“Neruneh, what is that?”

“Aaah, it's a magic tool I bought from a part timer in the baaar. Her little sister is an alchemist, or something like thaaat.” She rolled around the colorful balls that looked to be about three centimeters in diameter. Each one was apparently a different magic tool.

“This one shoots out firebaaalls, and this one makes drinking wateer.”

“And this one? Oooh, goodness, it’s shaking so much!”

“That’s for massageees. Oh, this one’s kind of amazing, it tastes sweet when you lick it. There sure are some genius alchemists all over the place.”

Interesting use of a magic tool, Rei thought, but she gave a disinterested reply in return. At most she thought about how they could probably sell it to the Succubi in the church.

“Siiiigh... The adventurers are fine. The town is doing fine. Even the Succubi in the church aren’t causing problems...”

“What’s the probleem? I’m making a lot of progress in my research.”

“...It’s good that no problems are happening, but perhaps my issue is that without any problems to solve, there are no opportunities to show my true worth. What do you think, Kinue?”

“Solving problems does leave a stronger impression, but I think the sign of true talent is not letting any problems happen in the first place. I think Master feels the same way, and that’s why he’s leaving you in charge.”

“Ngggh, but I wanna show off for Master... Yin and Yang! Light and Darkness...!” Rei mumbled to herself. In reality, Keima did value Rei highly. His entrusting her with so much DP to strengthen the dungeon was proof of that. No issues happening at all was definitely preferable for him. Though it was hard to deny that he wasn’t appreciative of her for solving the problems he kept bringing up himself.

“Heya, I’m back for a second. What’s going on?” And there the man himself popped into the room. Keima gulped down the cup of tea Kinue casually offered him, giving back only the teacup.

“M-Master?! Wait, er, why are you back so soon? It still should be a long time before it’s time for you to come back.”

“I’m just popping in for a second. I’ve gotta get back to the imperial capital pretty soon.”

“Oh, I see. You can come back from the capital fast using the [Ivory Beach].”

Keima nodded. “I just learned {Teleport} too, so it should be easier for me to get back here than before. Though I’ll have to make some massage chairs to finish the trade with Haku. Which reminds me, Haku is forcing me to help with someone else’s Dungeon Battle. Eugh, it sucks. I don’t wanna work.”

It seemed that Keima was negotiating trades with Haku, an extremely high level dungeon. Rei and Kinue felt a powerful sense of respect well up inside their chests. Meanwhile, Neruneh’s eyes were gleaming at the word {Teleport}.

“M-Master...! Is that {Teleport}, um, is it...!”

“...Er, yeah, it’s the Space-Time spell. But I won’t teach it to you. You’ll drain yourself of mana for sure if you try casting it. I can feel my own mana stores get drained hard from it, so I’m pretty sure with your current amount of mana you’d just die if you tried using it.”

“N-Ngh...! No waaay...” Neruneh slumped over in despair. Keima gave her a sad nod, then turned back to Rei.

“So, any problems?”

“No! Not at all!”

“...Rei was actually whining about having nothing to do, and that she was hoping that some problems happeeenn.”

“Wha! H-Hey, Neruneh! Why would you say that?!”

Keima gave an amused smile at their exchange. “That so? Perfect. There’s nothing better than having nothing to do. Keep up the good work, Rei.”

“R-Right! Absolutely!” Rei got out from the kotatsu to stand up and give a salute.

“Kinue, keep on giving them the support they need. I’m sure the inn’s busy, but I know you can do it.”

“Yes, Master. As you wish.” Kinue gave a maid’s bow.

“Oh, Neruneh. Here’s an idea I had for a magic tool on the road. It might be pretty useful.”

“Ooooh... This will add a big load to my research scheduleee! It might take a long time to finiiish.”

“Well, no rush. And feel free to say it’s impossible if you can’t do it.”

Neruneh seemed happy, having received the most wonderful present she could ask for.

“Hm? Wait, what’re those balls?” Keima asked after noticing the colorful balls on the kotatsu.

“Oooh, these are Magic Tools I bought for my own reseaaaarch. They were a good deaaaal.”

“I’ll cover that if you’re using them for research. Feel free to take some gold coins out of the safe... or actually, go ahead and take these hundred golds as a research grant.” Keima took out a bag full of gold coins and handed it to Neruneh. He received a hundred golds from Wataru every month, but they were still worth the equivalent of a hundred million yen in Japanese money.

“Are you suuure? This will help so muuuch.”

“Just say something if you run out. All I ask is that you get some results to show for it.”

“Okaaaay!” Neruneh gave an enthusiastic reply.

“Alright, I’m gonna go check out the dungeon for a sec, then I’m gone. Sheesh, I wish I didn’t have to work... I’ll go check up on the Silkies and Elulu too,” Keima said before vanishing like the wind.

“Let’s keep the dungeon problem-free, Kinue!”

“...You certainly are an innocent girl, Rei. Though, well, that’s one of your good points.”

“Haaah, and now I’m the only one who’s busy... I need to train to get my mana capacity uuup. Another month of spending all my money on mana potiooons... Anyway, I’m off to my laaab.”

“Neruneh. Do you want sandwiches for lunch? Or maybe rice balls?”

“Rice balls... or actually, a sandwich pleaaase. Use whatever ingredients you want, as long as it’s hoooot.”

And so, the monster girls left at the dungeon all had boosted enthusiasm. But none of them except Neruneh had anything new to do, so their enthusiasm ended up fading pointlessly into the ether.

Chapter 2 — Rokuko's Perspective

When the light faded, Mikan and Rokuko were in a great stone hall. It was built regally with ornate carvings in the walls, like a high-class ballroom. This year's theme seemed to be about castles.

But did there exist a ballroom massive enough for dragons to easily fly around, and was there a castle capable of containing it? Rokuko hadn't seen one outside of this gathering spot. Though perhaps she would find that a Core had made one somewhere, if she looked hard enough.

The participants of the gathering were as chaotic a bunch as ever. As far as Rokuko could see, there were Dragons, Pegasi, Unicorns, Ogres, Snakes, Frogs, Slugs... Not to mention a bunch of other things either in human form or not.

Still, Core 5, the Dragon King, managed to stick out despite the crowd. He was massive himself, and this time he was eating a chunk of meat almost as big as his body. What animal could produce meat the size of the Dragon King...?

In any case, Rokuko decided to move to the corner as soon as possible to avoid any attention. Last gathering had been outside, but this time it was inside. What did that mean? Walls. And walls brought peace to Rokuko's heart. Corners were divine.

"I'm gonna go to a corner, Core 629," Rokuko said, heading to one.

"Okie. I've got friends, so I'm gonna go say hello." In contrast, Mikan went to go meet his friends... only to freeze after turning around. He went back to Rokuko. "Wait... I changed factioooooons!" Mikan's ears slumped. Of all factions he had joined Haku's, the one known to have betrayed the Dungeon Cores. His former Core friends probably wouldn't want to do anything with him. He instinctively stomped his feet.

After a minute, he recovered. "Alright! Rokuko, could you introduce me to the other cores in Haku's faction?"

"...Sorry, I don't really know any."

"Um."

"Everyone in Haku's faction is keeping their allegiance a secret, so... Why don't you do the same? Just meet your friends like normal and don't say anything."

That was certainly one way for him to meet his friends. However

—
“Wouldn’t that basically make me a spy?!”

—It would basically make him a spy. Hiding one’s true affiliations and infiltrating another faction was the definition of spying. *Ah, so that’s why Haku’s called a Traitor*, Mikan thought to himself with a nod.

“I can’t do that to my friends... And like, I don’t know which of them might be in Haku’s faction too! It’s scary.”

“Very good point. That’s my sister’s devilish plotting for you,” Rokuko said with some proud nodding and a smile.

Incidentally, Rokuko standing out so much made it easier for the other Cores to hide. Although it was indeed impossible to hide Rokuko from the others, it took a cold heart for Haku to use even her cute little sister as a pawn in her political game. Within that coldness rested the key to breaking into the ranking’s Top Ten—or so Mikan concluded, anyway.

“Why don’t you just announce you’re in Haku’s faction too then, Mikan? You won’t be a spy if you announce it first.”

“Oooh! You’re smart, Rokuko. That’s right! Our friendships won’t crumble over some dumb faction politics! Probably...!”

“You don’t seem convinced.”

“...Will you comfort me if they hate me?”

“I’m not really confident I’d be good at that. Maybe you should give up.”

“Guuuh... I don’t feel so good about this...”

In reality, most of Mikan’s friends were pretty timid. They’d shriek and run away in shock the second he mentioned being in the Traitor faction. Not to mention, most of his friends were in the Beast King faction. He became their enemy the second he changed factions. It would be pretty hard for them to stay friends like that.

“I-I just have to explain...! I’m sure they’ll understand if I tell them what happened! I think!”

“What will you do if you explain, and then they ask you to never talk to them again?”

“Eeeek... R-Rokuko, you’re being mean! My tiny widdle heart is about to burst.”

“Well, what’s done is done. I’m gonna go to the corner. You should go see your friends.”

“O-Okay...” Mikan hopped away from Rokuko.

As she watched him from afar, Core 112—Ittetsu—came sliding over. “Heyaaa, Rokuko. Been a while... What’re you lookin’ at?”

“Oh, hi there, Core 112. It’s nothing, really. Just that over there.”

“Nmm? The rabbit, huh? Core 629. You friends or somethin’?”

“Kinda. A lot’s happened.”

Mikan was talking to his friends—a squirrel about as tall as a

child, and a normal old cat. They both gave shocked expressions (although it was hard to tell since they were animals) after he said something, and after a second they quietly walked away from him. Mikan walked back to Rokuko, looking depressed.

“It didn’t go so well...”

“My sympathy?”

“I dunno what fuckin’ happened, but cheer up, huh?”

“Right... Wait, Dungeon Core Number 112?! U-Um, I’ll, er, cheer up, don’t kill me please?!”

“Core 629, you’re talking weird.”

“Gahaha! I dunno what happened, but anything’s fine if you’ve got guts!” Ittetsu said while rubbing Mikan’s head with his tail. It was a bit heavy, but Mikan seemed to like it.

“R-Right! Thanks a ton!”

“Yeah. Alright, I’m off to pay respects to Dungeon Core Number 5. See ya later, Rokuko.”

“Uh-huh. Later.” Rokuko gave a lazy wave goodbye as Ittetsu stomped off.

Mikan turned stiffly to Rokuko, his fear not having faded yet. “Wh-Why did Dungeon Core Number 112 come over here?! And you both seemed so friendly!”

“Well, I mean... This is a gathering of Cores, remember?”

“That’s not what I’m talking about! Why was he hanging out with you like you’re old friends?! Didn’t you have a Dungeon Battle?!”

“He was probably just passing by. Besides, what does the Dungeon Battle have to do with anything?” Rokuko asked with a tilt of her head. “I’m friends with Core 112’s Dungeon Master. And Keima’s friends with Core 112, so yeah, he and I are friends too.”

“Wow... But why? Are you saying Dungeon Battles lead to friendships?”

“Ummm, probably not, no.” Rokuko envisioned the three idiots from the triple threat match. That was a Dungeon Battle, but she definitely wasn’t their friend. She would rather be friends with her self-proclaimed rival Core 666.

“Nmm, anyway, I’ll go see my friends who aren’t from the Beast King faction. I don’t wanna let Dungeon Core Number 112’s encouragement go to waste!”

“Bye bye. I’m actually going to the corner this time,” Rokuko said before watching Mikan hop away again. His friend this time was a Roper... a tentacle monster thing?

Wow, he sure has a lot of different friends, Rokuko thought, impressed by Mikan’s ability to make friends with all sorts of Cores. And this time, although the Roper looked taken aback at first, their friendship surpassed the blood of the covenant. They were squishing

and fluffing it up in a bro hug in no time. It may have looked like the Roper was eating Mikan, but it was actually... beautiful friendship. Yeah, that's what it was.

"Uh-huh. Good for you, Core 629." Rokuko decided that he would be fine on his own now, and this time for sure took a step toward her corner.

But then she noticed a Core gracefully walking toward her, high heels clipping the floor but her body remaining firmly upright. She was a standout Core among the 600 batch, and had already unlocked human morphing. Her long crimson hair said all you needed to know about her personality. She wore an invincible smile, and carried herself in a dangerous way that told anyone nearby they could get cut down by her true Magic Blade self if they let their guard down.

"There you are, Rokuko. It's been too long. How have you been?"

"Aidy! I've been doing super good. How are you?"

"Oh, quite good."

Core 666. The star child of the Demon King faction. She called herself Aidy, and she was one of Rokuko's few 'friends.' The red Valkyrie battle dress she wore suited the castle setting of the gathering well.

But despite the faction Aidy was in being an opposing one to hers—which is to say, any other faction at all—Rokuko greeted her with a smile. One that lacked the shadows and deceit that always lurked in Haku's when she smiled at Core 6.

"Did you just arrive, Rokuko?"

"Uh-huh. Did you get here earlier, Aidy?"

"I came with Grandfather, so yes."

Grandfather was Core 6, the top of the Demon King faction. Which meant Cores were summoned in the order of their number? That was the first time Rokuko had heard that.

"Which reminds me, we just got a letter from Haku. Are you involved in this, Rokuko?"

"Er. Nnm..." Rokuko briefly thought about whether she should answer Aidy. The letter she mentioned was most likely about the Dungeon Battle. Keima had asked for her to send it. Which meant... depending on the circumstances, it might be better for Rokuko to not mention her involvement. Things could get problematic if Aidy challenged her to another duel or some such. They would likely never win if Aidy joined the enemy to fight against them.

"Sorry, not ringing a bell."

"I see. Shall we duel, then?"

Rokuko tilted her head in confusion. Had she misspoke somehow?

"...Why would we duel?"

"Hm? Now that is a silly question. What do friends do if not duel

each other?"

"Maybe in the Demon King faction. We don't do that here."

"Fascinating. Let us duel, then."

"...I'm trying to say that where I'm from, we don't duel our friends." So Rokuko said, but she had spent so much of her life alone that if you asked her what friends did do together, she'd flounder and fail to think of even a single answer. *I-I'm friends with Redra and stuff now!* she protested on the inside. *But wait... Now that I think about it, didn't I have a Dungeon Battle with Redra too? And she's always asking me for another fight, saying she'll win this time. Ummm.* Rokuko kept these thoughts to herself.

"Where I am from, friends do duel each other. Our opinions are evenly split, which means differing culture is no valid excuse for refusing me."

"I mean, be a little considerate here. I'm a pacifist."

"That's true. Shall we duel, then? If you win, I shall adapt to your culture, and if I win, you shall adapt to mine. A simple solution if I have ever seen one."

"That's just ending with us dueling anyway," Rokuko said with narrowed eyes and a frown. But Aidy just widened her confident smile, as if she was speaking completely from the heart.

"I'll just warn you now, Aidy. This sword is decorative!"

"Oh yes, I forgot about that. I can prepare a usable sword for you myself."

"...Er, I mean, I'm trying to say I don't know how to use swords."

"Truly? Then we must duel even sooner. Only through real battle will you learn the ways of the blade."

"You're going to bring it back to duels no matter what I say, huh?" Rokuko said while scratching her head. That was when Mikan came back from deepening his bond with his tentacle fellow. Aaaand, he really shouldn't have. Rokuko's instincts screamed danger as he happily hopped his way to her.

"Heeey, Rokuko! I did it! I did have a true friend after all! Thanks for pushing me to try, Rokuko!" Mikan wagged his ears happily.

"Um, Core 629? I-I'm kind of in the middle of something." Rokuko glanced at Aidy then back to Mikan, sweating. Aidy was in the Demon King faction, and Mikan was about to fight a Dungeon Battle with the Demon King faction. Nothing good could happen from those two meeting.

"My my, Core 629. You certainly seem to be on good terms with my Rokuko."

"Wha? G-Gah! Core 666?! I just noticed you! What, are you spying on your enemy?!" Mikan jerked in fear, then hid behind Rokuko's back and popped out his head to gnash his teeth at her.

“Spying on my enemy, hm? I suppose I could. After all, Core 629, I hear that you’ve joined Haku’s faction.”

“H-How do you know that?!”

“I also read the letter delivered to Grandfather. Very bold of you to challenge a Demon King faction Core to a duel. And Core 564 at that. To be honest, I don’t believe you have a chance of winning whatsoever.”

“H-Hmph! I’ve got strong helpers on my side! I’m not gonna go down without a fight! In fact, he’s the one that’s gonna go down!” Mikan airboxed behind Rokuko.

“Oh, strong helpers, you say? Within Haku’s faction?” Aidy asked with a glance at Rokuko, making her smile twitch.

“I-I have nothing to do with this, so.”

“What?! D-Don’t say that, please... Aren’t we friends by now, Rokuko?”

“Ngh!” Rokuko was weak to comments like that. After all, Rokuko had been all alone until Keima came along. And Mikan had been fairly nice to her even back then, too. She couldn’t tell him they weren’t friends.

“...R-Right. Core 629 and I are friends. We’re in the same faction, so!”

“Factions don’t have anything to do with it! Even if something happens to me and I end up changing faction again, we’ll always be friends, Rokuko!”

“Fascinating. It’s like witnessing a worm thinking a bird is its friend. Rokuko is my arch enemy, I will have you know. What right do you have to befriend her?”

“Siiigh. Listen closely, Core 666. You’ve got the wrong idea. There aren’t any rules stopping people from being friends. Anyone can be friends!” Mikan declared from behind Rokuko. *Stop it, Core 629! This is surely just a cultural misunderstanding. No doubt you have to earn the right to be someone’s friend in the Demon King faction,* Rokuko thought while feeling sharp pain in her stomach. Did having friends always hurt so much...?

“I see. Very well then, Core 629. I shall challenge you to a duel.”

“...E-Er, my schedule’s full already. I need to focus on my upcoming Dungeon Battle. Sorry, it’s really too bad. A real shame,” Mikan said while averting eye contact. It was clear as day he was just using that as an excuse, and would never agree to a duel if he could help it.

“A full schedule... Core 564, I suppose. That won’t be an issue. I shall lend you a hand as well so that we can hurry and get Core 564 out of the way. Once we have mopped the floor with him, I shall challenge you to a duel.”

“Er?”

“Um, what?”

Rokuko and Mikan both rapidly blinked in confusion. What had Aidy just said?

“It is not so complicated. I shall challenge you to a duel once we have mopped the floor with Core 564.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about! Er, well, it kinda is, but I mean... You’re going to help?”

“Oh, yes. Your goal is to crush Core 564, no? I shall help.” They hadn’t misheard. Aidy repeated herself clearly, with no room for misunderstandings.

“Nah, nah, nah, but why?! He’s part of your own faction!”

“It is quite simple, really. Haku described the details of the event in her letter, and Grandfather of course replied that he had no need for a fool that would mistake the faction with which he was picking a fight. I am perfectly free to crush him with my own two hands.”

“Whaaat...”

To be fair, that was actually reasonable of them. It was true that Mikan’s dungeon was in a suspicious location, but picking fights with a faction unopposed to your own was not acceptable. That alone would be worthy of punishment, but in this case the one he picked a fight with actually did end up joining the opposition. Not to mention, this meant that Core 564 had given a false report when he said he had picked a fight with a Core from Haku’s faction. Even if he hadn’t done so intentionally, and even though Mikan had in fact switched over, it didn’t even need to be said that it served as the final straw for Core 6.

“It was decided right before the gathering that Core 564 would only be forgiven if he destroyed Core 629 or put him under his control. I suppose he is getting informed of this now.”

Mikan let out a tiny squeak. Put in another way, she was saying Core 564 would be going all out to kill him. He would need all the help he could get. But at the same time, he didn’t have the authority to ask for help from Aidy, a member of a rival faction.

“...Could you talk to Haku about it?”

“I could. But I imagine Grandfather will say something himself, so consider it done.”

“Hrm. So, why do you wanna help me anyway, Core 666? I couldn’t tell from all that why you’d want to.”

“Oh, my reasoning is simple.” Aidy continued with a giggle. “This is my opportunity to beat down Core 564 and crush him with impunity. Fighting a 500 batch Core will be quite exhilarating, I’m sure.”

“.....”

Both Mikan and Rokuko believed her completely, since her

reasoning was nothing if not emblematic of the bloodthirsty Demon King faction. Aidy was a battle junkie that wanted all the fights she could get with strong opponents.

“Not to mention, you are receiving help from none other than my archenemy Rokuko. I would like to experience fighting by her side as well, just for the fun of it.”

Ah, right, she saw through me. Rokuko averted her eyes.

Keima's Perspective

When Rokuko got back, she casually told me that Aidy had joined the fight on our side.

“She’ll be coming to visit tomorrow, I’m pretty sure.”

“Alrighty then.” *Hm.* Can’t say I expected Aidy from the Demon King faction to be joining us. There’s a lot of things I can’t do freely with her around... though, I guess I was hiding most of my trump cards from Haku in the first place. This shouldn’t change much. Except my understanding that this was a proxy war between the Demon King faction and Haku’s faction.

“That’s the thing. It was settled, like, super fast. So much so that Core 8—oh, that’s the Beast King, head of the Beast King faction and number ten in the DP rankings—actually bowed his head to Haku and asked her to take care of Core 629. It caused a big fuss.”

“Huh. The Beast King’s faction is the one Mikan used to belong to, right?”

“Uh-huh! I can’t believe Dungeon Core Number 8 would bow his head to me like that! I was so moved!” Mikan wiggled his orange fluff tail out of happiness. So fluffy.

Now this is interesting. The top of an organization bowed his head for an underling that had to split. Not a bad move; it cost him nothing but will have earned him a lot of loyalty. As far as I can tell, he wasn’t being sniveling about it. He was just showing that he cared about his faction members. Not to mention, he set the stage for Mikan coming back to his faction once all this was done. Mikan would basically be a spy in that case, coming back with info on Haku. I don’t know if he planned all this out or just did it with his animal instincts as Beast King, but he’s not someone I can let my guard down around. I should avoid ever making an enemy of him. Though I doubt anyone would want to make enemies with someone strong enough to get in the top ten of the DP rankings.

“...So, I think Aidy joining us as an ally is kinda complicating things, Keima. What do you think? Will it mess up your plans?”

“Huh? Oh, nah. I didn’t expect this, but it won’t cause any problems on my end. Really, it solved the problem of how we should approach our offensive strategy.”

“Wait, really?”

I had been putting off thinking about our offensive strategy since we didn't know enough about Core 564 to make any solid plans, but that would be solved entirely by leaving it to Aidy. A reserved backup plan for use in the event of her failure should suffice.

“Yep. It'll be totally fine as long as Aidy doesn't betray us and attack Core 629.”

“Okay then. That means we should have Aidy go fully on the offensive without letting her participate in the defensive. I don't think she'll betray us after announcing her intentions to Father, but it's possible she switches straight into attack mode after the battle is over. That leaves us with no choice but to send her out on the attack,” Rokuko said, casually outlining the plans I had for Aidy before I could say them. *Man, Rokuko sure has gotten smarter, huh? Very nice.*

“Before this my plan was to maneuver Wataru into attacking them. But I imagine there'd be no way to do that without spilling some dungeon secrets. Like how the Dungeon Battles work, or something.”

“Uh-huh. Aidy joining us is actually kind of a big boon.”

“Yeah, we've only got Niku and Ichika as fighters on our side. Maybe we should just leave literally all of it to Aidy.” Not to mention, though I did ask Haku to lend us Wataru on the day of the dungeon battle, her response was kinda noncommittal. I needed to make plans in case she couldn't lend him to us.

It was then that Mikan, formerly ignored, jumped into the conversation. “Keima, Keima! What should I be doing?”

“Your job is to keep on being sweet to the adventurers that come to the dungeon.” Without much else for him to do, I asked Mikan to deal with customers in the rabbit dungeon.

Regarding that dungeon, by the way, I had gone back with the party while Rokuko was at the gathering and spread news that it was a dungeon where you could love rabbits. Our report could be summarized as: The dungeon had some mysteries, but it didn't seem dangerous.

At the moment, Ichigo and the rabbits alongside Niku and Ichika were controlling the white rabbits to show the second exploration party a cute and fluffy good time. Misha had hand-picked them, so things were progressing smoothly.

“Okie dokie. I'll charm them like a Succubus!”

“And this time we're gonna do it. The ambush training.”

“R-Right. I should've mentioned the gathering sooner! I thought for sure Rokuko had already said something.”

Yeah, that's the kinda thing a Dungeon Master and Core should stay on top of themselves. I can't blame Mikan for thinking I knew.

“Give me at least a week of notice next year, alright?”

“Oh, right, sure. I will if I don’t forget by then.”

Welp, guess I’ll have to figure it out myself next year. I let out a sigh. “So, did anything else happen at the gathering?”

“Ohhh, right. You remember the Dungeon Eaters that showed up in our dungeon before, right? Father gave everyone a warning about them. Apparently they’ve taken down some Cores.”

Whoa. Those Dungeon Eaters are showing up in other dungeons too, huh?

“Also, I got a lot of attention this year thanks to the Dungeon Battle I did with Haku last year. Oh, and our ranking went up! We’re at 180 now. Aidy’s 173, so we should pass her by next year. Or rather, we definitely will. We’re a great team, aren’t we?” Rokuko puffed out her chest with pride. I wasn’t entirely sure just how worthy of celebration moving up the ranks was, but I could imagine it was more exciting than I thought it was.

“Nice, that’s good news. Where was Mikan?”

“I was in 290th place! That’s ten whole spots up from last year.”

Huh, I guess that means Rokuko and I passed him in just a year... Guess I can’t brag too much. We’ve earned a ton of DP through Ittetsu and Haku.

“What rank did Core 564 get?” I asked.

“Rank 167. I checked his DP and saw he had millions.”

“Seems like he’s gonna be one tough cookie...”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from a 500 batch core in the Demon King faction. But Core 6 has basically given him a death sentence, and Aidy taunted the heck out of him. Like, a ton. He got so mad his human morphing broke apart and he went back to his Baphomet form.”

“Oh, Baphomet, huh?” Now that’s good to know. We can make more specialized plans now that we know his true identity. But what was a Baphomet, again? Pretty sure it’s a goat-headed demon. I wonder what its weak points are. Can’t think of any right now. Maybe Haku or even Aidy has an idea.

“Also, did you manage to get any special victory conditions?”

“Nope. Whoever touches the other’s Core first wins. Though Aidy was saying she might slip and crush his by accident.”

“Yeah, that seems like an Aidy move.”

“...Either way, it’s basically a three-on-one now. I’m starting to feel kinda bad for Core 564. Though it’s technically balanced with three 600 batch Cores against a 500 batch Core.”

True. There’s about a one hundred year gap between each batch of one hundred Cores or so. It’s hard to say whether that makes this three-on-one balanced, though, and I guess having a Dungeon Master or not changes

things further. The idiot trio from the triple threat match was considered one team just because they didn't have a Dungeon Master, after all, and they were all part of the 600 batch.

"Guess I should ask Aidy if Core 564 has a Dungeon Master or not."

"Aidy probably knows. Core 6 likes her more than anyone else in the Demon King faction, I think."

Yeah, I'm sure Aidy's gonna have a ton of good info for us. I'll focus on the defensive line until she gets here.

* * *

Haku called me over. Her business was, put simply, informing me that she couldn't lend me Wataru.

"Errr. Did something happen?"

"There's some trouble brewing in the country of Daide. I'm afraid I must send him there." Prior to this, we had planned for her to send Wataru my way on the day of the dungeon battle. We would never lose with a Hero like him defending our dungeon, but it seemed things wouldn't be going so easily for me.

"I predict that this is something that only Wataru can handle," Haku said before explaining that to survive the trouble in Daide and emerge unscathed one would need {Ultra Good Fortune} at all times. I had no idea how bad things were over there, but if borrowing Wataru wasn't an option, I just had to face the facts.

"...Can I borrow some other firepower, then?"

"Well. We can discuss that, but I do not truly have much to offer you."

"That so? I would think that—"

"They're my direct subordinates."

Ah, right. If Haku lent a direct subordinate, then that would be her directly interfering with the Dungeon Battle. I could imagine that there would be more than a few problems with that. Though I feel like it should be kind of a non-issue now that an actual member of the Demon King's faction is helping us. Maybe it doesn't matter since Aidy is friends with Rokuko?

"...Is Wataru not a direct subordinate?"

"He's not one of my monsters, so no."

Ah. That's what she meant.

"In that case, could you lend... the Knight's Order or some such?"

"But of course. That's the plan," she replied. There would be no problem at all with her lending me the human platoons of the Knight's Order with no monsters mixed in. "The strongest force I can lend you this time is, let's see... The emperor's own Imperial Guards."

Whoa, now they seem like they'll be strong!

“As they are the personal guards of the imperial family, I will have to send one of the emperor’s family along with them.”

“Oh, the imperial family, huh?”

“Emmymephy should suffice for this. We could claim we are sending her to investigate the new dungeon, but I would prefer a more significant and noble goal for a member of the imperial family to be heading to the dungeon. Do you have any ideas?” Haku asked with a smile.

...Alright, I get it. She’s telling me to do something entertaining for her.

“Alright, well, guess I don’t have much of a choice. I’ll go forward with the project I set up in case we couldn’t borrow Wataru. We have to basically gamble on it going well, but it should give you the noble goal you’re looking for.”

“Oh my. So you did have a plan after all. I wonder what this project of yours is?”

“The ideal way to get a bunch of people in one place. If I were to give it a name, well... How about...”

Project Strawberry.

The project which one day would become a legend began on that day.

* * *

I went back to Mikan’s dungeon and immediately called Ichigo to the back.

“U-Umm. Y-You wanted to see me?” Ichigo cowered and trembled as she stood before me, Mikan, and Rokuko. Her rabbit ears were limp. But still, I tossed her a question.

“Ichigo. Are you prepared to do anything for this dungeon?”

“Bwuh?! Um, o-of courshe!” Despite biting her tongue at the end, her resolve was fast and true. That was exactly the kind of response I wanted to hear.

“Alright then. Project Strawberry begins now. Ichigo, you’re gonna be the star of this project.”

“Wha? Project...? Star?” Ichigo blinked in surprise with a question mark popping over her head. She wasn’t following, but her fate was already sealed.

“Go, go, Ichigo! The fate of our dungeon rests on you!”

“Good luck! I believe in you!”

Mikan and Rokuko were thorough in their fervent support, confusing Ichigo further.

“U-Um! What do I actually need to do...?”

“Well, Ichigo! Umm... We want you to, um... Ermmm...” Mikan glanced at me, so I answered for him.

“We want you to become an idol.”

“An... idol?”

“Yep. An idol.”

Idols. They were women beloved by many and naturals at getting others to fall for them. Some were singers, some were dancers, some were models. Some had more standard jobs, while others were reporters and voice actors. Though in this world they were more like popular fighters in arenas, popular theater actors, or like, popes and members of the imperial families.

“Th-That sounds amazing! C-Could I r-really become one of them?”

“You can... and you know what? You will.” I gave a meaningful grin. “The world I’m from, or rather, Japan was filled to the brim with idols. I was born in what some call the Warring Idols Period.”

“W-Warring Idols...”

“They fought each day, honing their skills and overcoming rivalries in neverending bloodbaths. And me? I know all about their idol techniques.” Indeed. This was the classic cheat skill of simply remembering stuff from your former world. It was basically cultural warfare.

“Our goal will be to hold a concert one month from now—a live show. A member of the Laverio imperial family will be invited.”

“Eek?!”

Indeed. The imperial princess Emmymephy would be visiting the rabbit dungeon to both investigate it and attend an idol concert. That was the crux of my plan.

...All things said and done, though, I didn’t mind if the concert failed. Investigating the dungeon would be more than enough to justify Emmymephy’s presence. All I wanted to do was use the opportunity to get as many people here as possible and profit off it.

“You said you’d do anything for the dungeon, right? Good luck, Ichigo!”

“I-I did say that! I did, but! A-Aww... I-I’ll do my best!”

“From now on, you can call me ‘producer.’”

“R-Right! Producer!”

“Oh, and Mikan? Prepare some backup dancer rabbits for her.”

“Rogeeer!”

And so, Ichigo took her first step toward idolhood. *Now... Time for lessons!*

* * *

All that said, Ichigo’s idol debut was still a long way off. For now she would be working as an adventurer, selling vegetable snacks for the rabbits at the [Rabbit Rest Spot]. The second exploration party had finished its investigation, leading to the [Rabbit Rest Spot] being

safely opened as a semi-restricted dungeon. There were a decent number of adventurers checking it out now.

“V-Veggie stiiicks! Does anyone want veggie stiiicks?”

Of course, this was also serving as training for her to get used to talking in front of people while overcoming her embarrassment. It was killing two birds with one stone.

As for the adventurers, our customers...

“Ngggh, they’re so friggin’ cute...!”

“Yeah... Paradise was right under our noses all along. A fluffy paradise.”

“Man oh man! I never woulda thought that rabbits were this amazing! I’m never gonna eat rabbit meat again!”

“Idiot, these rabbits are nothing like normal rabbits. Just look at how clean and fluffy their fur is. Ahhhh, oh man, you guys wanna eat some veggie snacks from my hands...?”

They were all head over heels for the rabbits. They cared more about cute fluffiness than cute girls, which helped Ichigo do her work without much issue.

“Ichigo, could I get some veggie sticks?”

“C-Certainly! Six coppers per cup! Thank you for your business!”

And the veggie sticks for the rabbits were selling very well. I wanted to believe that some of those sales had to do with Ichigo’s own charm and allure.

“Wait, six coppers for that little? Isn’t this kinda expensive?”

“Shut it, idiot. The rabbits’ll eat it right out of your hands, y’know? They’ll even sit on your lap. Think about it.”

“Man, that’s cheap!”

“A-Also, all the profit from these snacks is planned to go to funding systems to protect the rabbits! O-Oh, and we’ll buy back empty cups for one copper, so!”

“Ah, so it’s practically just five coppers a cup, huh? I’ll take three, then.”

Not to mention, the rabbits loved the vegetable sticks Ichigo sold. That was important since they didn’t seem to eat much of the vegetables the adventurers brought in themselves. Rumor was they had something like catnip for rabbits in them, and that the five copper price had something to do with it. The sticks sold like nothing else.

...To spill the beans, those controlling the rabbits determined from the special cups which vegetables were sold by Ichigo and ate only those. The rabbits didn’t have room in their stomachs for any other vegetables, so outside of particularly hungry rabbits (those controlled by Ichika), they didn’t even bother looking at them.

Ichigo retrieved and reused the sold cups. Thanks to the one copper payment, so far there was a one hundred percent rate of

people returning cups. We could think of some special countermeasures if people tried putting brought-in vegetables into the cups. The rabbits weren't wild, after all. They were intelligent and doing as they were told.

So yeah, the business had a shady side to it, but nobody was suffering for it. Really, there was a lot of good will involved. And it was important for Ichigo's training, too.

"One stick cup."

"Oh, Rinnew! Thanks again!"

The strong adventurers that loved cute things Tokoi had been speaking of appeared in the [Rabbit Rest Spot] in no time at all. Rinnew, an intimidating-looking woman, was one such adventurer. Once she got a cup of stick vegetables from Ichigo, she immediately began feeding the white rabbit on her shoulder.

"Haaaah, so friggin' cuuute! This place is just too good." Rinnew, watching the rabbit munch happily on the vegetables, melted in such a joyous expression it was hard to imagine she was the same person that marched down the dungeon steps with an almost demonic glare.

"Wow, you're Rinnew, right? I didn't know you liked it here too!" a passing female adventurer said.

"Of friggin' course I do, this place is somethin' else... Fluffy fluffy." Rinnew gently rubbed her cheek against the rabbit on her shoulder. The rabbit didn't mind that at all, and in fact rubbed its own fluffy body back against her.

"Aaahaaah... I thought for sure Tokoi had lost his damn mind when he started talking about a rabbit fund, but right now I'd easily dump five golds into it."

"So you really like them, then?"

"Course I do! Ahaah, too cute. I wanna take this little guy home with me..."

"E-Excuse me, no taking the rabbits out of the dungeon! Th-They live here, a-and they want to stay!" Ichigo warned, having heard Rinnew's murmur.

"Huh? Aaah, right. I wouldn't wanna rip him away from his friends and stuff."

The rabbit hopped off Rinnew's shoulder onto a nearby shrub. Close by was another rabbit. Two flawless white fluffballs... It was heaven on the eyes.

"Hey, you. Your name's Ichigo, right?"

"Th-That's right! I'm Ichigo!" Ichigo bobbed her head in a bow. Rinnew whispered into her rabbit ears.

"S-So... Is it true that rabbit beastkin can talk to rabbits?"

"Well, I can with the rabbits here."

"Oooh... H-Hey, can you tell me what that one's saying?" Rinnew

asked with beaming eyes, leaning closer.

“Ummm... Okay, got it. He says you’re nice and he loves you. He wants you to rub him more, and he doesn’t mind if you rub his belly a bit. Oh, and right now he’s really full,” she said, and the rabbit showed his belly as if to back her up. It looked a little swollen from all the food.

“Oooh, for real? I can rub his belly... Ahahaaah, whoa, this is legit. So cuuuuuute, ahaaah. So so so cute... So cute.”

Rinnew immediately started her belly rubbing. Nobody could blame her vocabulary for crumbling to nothing. Seriously, nobody could. When you well and truly believed something was cute, you lost the ability to say any other word.

“I’ve never seen Rinnew like this... Rabbits are something else,” said an adventurer who knew Rinnew, shocked by how different she was from normal. Normally, Rinnew was sharp and hard, more manly than even most men. Seriously.

“Rabbits certainly are cute.”

“Aaah... I just want to live here already.”

There were a surprising amount of adventurers who said the same thing as Rinnew. That just went to show how in love they were with the rabbits.

“Maybe you should just build a town here?” Ichigo suggested.

“...Nah, it’d be a bit much to build a town in a dungeon with nothing but rabbits. It’s good for camping, or well, there’s enough people camping there’s basically a base of camps, but...” Rinnew trailed off, thinking over Ichigo’s joke with a serious expression.

“Aaah... Rinnew, Tokoi was talking about how convenient it’d be if there were food stands here.”

That was an idea that Kegirl (Keima) had guided Tokoi toward. (There was Ichigo selling vegetable sticks, but there wasn’t any food marketed for adventurers.)

“Sounds good to me. What do you think, rabbits...? Wait, I can’t understand them. Ichigo, could you explain so the rabbits understand?”

“Oh, certainly. Mmm... Okay, they’re fine with it. But since this is a dungeon, an employee will need to be with it at all times so it doesn’t get swallowed up.”

“No problem. We can have the food storage buildings and everything outside the dungeon, with some stands closer by with a bunch of girls carrying boxes walking around like arena snack sellers.”

“Oooh! Another great idea, Rinnew!” the adventurer explained. You could tell how serious and skilled she was by how she immediately thought of practical solutions to problems.

And that was when their lovely conversation was interrupted by

shrill warning bells. The sounds echoed, and then the faint green light that covered the room and marked it as a Safe Zone... disappeared.

“Wh-What the?! What’s this noise?!”

“Hey, the Safe Zone effect is gone!”

A stir broke out among the adventurers. That was to be expected—the safe zone had disappeared. Rinnew switched modes in her head and was launching orders in no time.

“Everyone, get your weapons! Stand on guard!”

“Rinnew! The rabbits are frightened! Keep your voice down!”

Rinnew glanced down and saw the rabbits quaking with their hands over their heads. “F-Forgive me.”

“U-Um, they’re not scared of you! It’s not your shouting... it’s the, um, the monsters about to come for them!” Ichigo translated the rabbit’s words, and the adventurers got even more on guard. A few seconds later, moving statues—Gargoyles—started marching into the room from a hallway leading deeper into the dungeon. There were three of them. If they were normal Gargoyles, any of the adventurers there could handle all of them easily.

“Ichigo, are those the enemies?”

“...Y-Yes, those are the enemies! Please defeat them!”

“Alright then. Let’s go, lads! Protect the rabbits!”

“HEAR HEAR!” The adventurers were bloodthirsty and ready to kill. It was hard to imagine they had just been doting on the rabbits. Though then again, it was precisely because they were doting on the rabbits that they would show no mercy to the enemy Gargoyles.

To summarize the results: They handled it without issue. They blocked the magic attacks aimed at the rabbits with their shields, blocked the axe swings with swings of their own, and defeated them with their sword skills. It was a bit of a letdown after how much they had pumped themselves up, but once the Gargoyles were gone the Safe Zone effect returned.

“What was that all about... Whoa?!”

“Whoa, whoa?! What’s with you guys?”

The previously cowering rabbits were now rubbing their bodies against Rinnew as hard as they could.

“...Oh, oh! Th-They’re so friggin’ fluffy!”

“Rinnew! You’re smiling so hard!”

“Don’t look! O-Oh, d-don’t you guys wanna touch the rabbits? Uwooh, s-so cuuuute!”

The rabbits, probably due to the enemies being destroyed, were overjoyed. And there came three new rabbits working together to carry over a box. Inside were three potions. Ichigo took the box from the rabbits and nodded while talking to them.

“...It sounds like this is their way of saying thanks.”

“Haha, isn’t that nice of them! Alrighty. I finally get what kinda dungeon this is.”

“What kind of dungeon this is?’ What do you mean, Rinnew?”

The sign in front of the dungeon’s entrance. The rabbits. The enemies. The reward potions. It wasn’t too hard to connect the dots and see the rules of the dungeon.

“I’m pretty sure this is a dungeon where you get rewarded with items for protecting the rabbits. There might be some other rule we don’t know about that explains why there weren’t any attacks before this. Maybe they only happen once every so many days, maybe there needs to be enough people inside.”

“Neat! That sounds good. Nothing better than fighting to protect cute rabbits and getting rewarded for it.”

“R-Right?! Th-This sure is a good dungeon! Yes!”

“Yeah. I’ll have to investigate a bit more, but I’m pretty sure that’s how this dungeon works.”

Ichigo beamed a smile and nodded hard at Rinnew’s conclusions.

* * *

Some distance away from the [Rabbit Rest Spot] was the [Rabbit Paradise]. Today Ichigo was having a dance lesson there. She moved on her feet with fancy footwork to match the beat of my clapping.

“One, two, one, two,” I said.

“One, two, one, two!” she shouted back. As one would expect from a War Rabbit, she was skilled at that kind of bouncing movement and learned the dance in no time. Her training was going well, thanks in part to some secret techniques I was using to help.

“Alright, good work. Let’s have a five minute break.”

“Th-Thank you, producer.” Ichigo slumped to the ground where she stood. I went ahead and gave her a towel and a sports drink. She wiped away her sweat while chugging the drink down. “Fwaaah, so good...”

“At this rate it’s looking like you’ll be able to sing and dance about three different songs when the time comes.”

“Three songs... I’ll do my best!”

By the way, I was getting Kosaki the Succubus ring to help me write the songs, lyrics and all. She could read my heart while possessing me and determine the true appeal of idol songs from Japan, which was a major boon. Not to mention that she could make full use of her Succubus talents on top of that to absolutely load the songs with charm. Considering Succubi were all about charming people, in a certain sense making music was second nature to them. Kosaki was a strong ally to have here.

“Um, producer. Can you demonstrate the song to me again?”

“.....” I fell silent at Ichigo’s request.

“Producer?”

“R-Right. Yeah, sure.”

When it came to the music itself, golems could play the instruments as much as she needed, but I had to sing the songs. Same for the dancing, since Clay Golems were too large to be of any use. Though I could make an Idol Golem if I busted out the full extent of my {Create Golem} skills and fused a Recorder Golem with a Mannequin Golem, thereby creating a golem that could both sing and dance, though I had no confidence in the face.

“...Not really a huge fan of doing this, though.”

“Please, producer! I want to get this as right as possible!” Ichigo looked straight at me with wide, honest eyes. *Alright, alright.*

I went ahead and called forth her teacher, Kosaki. But Kosaki had no body. How did I do that then? Indeed, through possession. I gave her permission to possess me.

“And thus returns Succuma! Okay, time for more lessons, girlfriend!” Kosaki took control of my body, moving my limbs and mouth without any input from me.

“Kyaaaah! Succumaaaa!”

“Let’s make you into a wonderful idol! Hip, hip, hooraaaay!”

“Hip, hip, hooraaaay!”

And so, the succubus charmed the absolute hell out of Ichigo. That was the secret technique I hinted at earlier. She listened to everything I said while in a charmed state. And since she studied in an absurd frenzy while charmed, she learned unnaturally fast. Ichigo was about as smart as you probably thought she was, which is to say not at all, but thanks to {Charm} she was learning the songs that I (Kosaki) made without any issue at all.



Succubi could even alter memories with the power of {Charm}. Teaching a song was easy, of course—we could even force the knowledge of how to do the dance into her mind, all the way down to when and how to smile. Considering Succubi instinctively knew exactly how to maximize cuteness, well, they were probably the best idol trainers you could ask for.

Huh? Why don't I just be the idol? Hell no! It isn't my Dungeon Battle this time! But seriously, if I didn't have to lend my body for this, it would be an entirely different story. Seriously. She needs to possess me to help Ichigo unlock her full potential. She needs my talent to teach the golems songs. She needs me since I'm about the same height as Ichigo and will be the best. If not for all that, I'd leave this to Niku, but alas...

"I will now sing the song. Listen please! This one's 'A Loving Rabbit's Always Straightforward!'"

"Kyaaaah! Succumaaa! Produceeer!"

Kosaki the Succubus ring moved my body and made me dance while singing a cute song.

"I want these feelings to reach you you yooou!"

"You you yooou!"

"I'm a rabbit in love!"

"A rabbit!"

Ichigo was having the time of her life while interjecting lines. *Don't tell me she just wanted to see Succuma... Actually, that's fine. Becoming obsessed with an idol is the fastest way to learn to appreciate them. In other words, Ichigo is studying idols intensely right now with all her body and soul.*

"Producer, take my hand!"

"...Tada!" I said with a smile.

"Aaaahn! So wonderful!"

Well that's that, then. Next up is Ichigo, once she wipes up that nosebleed. Go forth, rabbit girl. Your experienced teacher Succuma will be watching.

* * *

Preparations for both the Dungeon Battle and the idol concert were going smoothly. And then Core 666—Aidy—finally arrived at our dungeon.

"I have arrived. Treat me as a guest of honor," she said with her flat chest puffed out smugly. Who died and made her a rich girl... Oh, right, she is basically a rich girl in the Demon King faction. Riiight. Anyway, I don't see her Master anywhere... I guess he's holding down the home fort for her.

"Thanks for coming, Aidy."

“Ahaha, but of course. Good to see you again, Rokuko. Although... why is this not the dungeon whose location Core 564 revealed after some interrogation?”

Apparently, Aidy had first gone to Mikan’s original dungeon, which was presently an empty shell with nobody in it. *Yeah, we’ve moved pretty much everyone over to the [Rabbit Rest Spot]. Oh, and while we’re on the subject, I’ve heard that the Guild has registered this dungeon as the [White Rabbit Garden]. There’s your useless fact of the day.*

“What do you expect prey to do when a carnivore finds their nest? Do you think they sit around and wait to be eaten? Nah. They run away.”

“A logical answer. I would expect nothing less from Rokuko’s Master,” Aidy said, nodding in understanding.

“Though, well, the real reason is everyone just finds it a lot more fun to be here instead,” Rokuko noted.

“Aha. That’s quite like you, Rokuko.” Aidy gave a cackle that very much made her sound like a Core from the Demon King faction. The cackle was kind of weird, honestly. It was right in the middle between being pure evil and being kinda girlish, with no way of telling which it really was. *I probably shouldn’t read too deep into it...*

“So, what do you need me to do?” she asked.

“...Well, for now, could I ask you to tell us about Core 564? I hear he’s a demon-type Core. A Baphomet, to be precise.”

“I’ve never been given a simpler job. I shall tell you all that I or anyone else knows about Core 564.”

Now that’s what I like to hear! And so, Aidy went ahead and indeed told me everything she knew about Core 564. Here are the details!

- He can morph into human form.
- His true form is a Baphomet, a demon-type monster.
- Despite being a demon, he can’t disappear into shadows or hide within them.
- He is a physical being that is thus vulnerable to physical attacks.
- He has strengthened his body to some degree, and Mikan would undoubtedly lose in a one-on-one fight.
- Rokuko might be able to last longer... Actually, no, I take that back.
- It would be hard even for me (Aidy) to beat him in a one-on-one fight. Give me your assistance.
- His dungeon is demon themed. To my knowledge he has no Master.
- To my understanding he uses Gargoyles, as well as Lesser Demons and Succubi.
- His dungeon administrators include at least one Greater Demon,

if I remember correctly.

- His armies during the Dungeon Battle will likely consist of Skeletons and Gargoyles.

“Huh, that’s a neat coincidence. Our armies will probably consist of my Gargoyles and your Skeletons, Aidy.”

“One can summon as many monsters as they like if they have easy access to mana. Truly, there is nothing better for forming armies.”

“Agreed. The best part is how you can summon an army without spending any DP at all.”

Pretty much every Core in the Demon King faction knew the {Summon Skeleton} skill as a matter of course. Core 6 enjoyed warfare strategies built around leading legions of demons, which tended to involve massive floods of Skeletons. He apparently used a summoning skill one step above {Summon Skeleton} for his own purposes, and thanks to that {Summon Skeleton} was a popular basic skill for those in the Demon Faction to learn. “...Should you really be talking about the Great Demon King battle strategies like this?”

“Just how many years do you think Grandfather and Haku have been at war? Both she and everyone else have known of Grandfather’s proclivities for centuries by now.”

Yeah, that makes sense. This is all basic stuff, anyway. The only way to beat strength by numbers is with numbers of your own, or by having strong enough soldiers to overcome the number gap. Treating that like top-secret military strategies would just get you laughed at.

“Just wondering, are you also playing around by wearing a toy crown?”

“This is a princess tiara given to me by Grandfather himself. Do not treat it like one of those fakes.”

“Ah. Right.”

Either way, Aidy seemed pretty well-informed about all this. She really was Granddaddy’s little girl.

“So, I ask again. What do I need to do?”

...For now, I decided it was best to have Aidy summon Skeletons for the adventurers to beat. They seemed pretty well-suited for the role.

“It’s all to help us win the Dungeon Battle, Aidy. We could really use your help here,” Rokuko said.

“Hm. So you want me to put on a show for wild humans, then? You think of the most interesting things. Very well, then. I shall deign to help,” Aidy said, assenting casually, no doubt thanks to Rokuko’s additional prompting.

And so, with that done, Skeletons were thrown into the mix of monsters attacking the rabbits as we prepared for the Dungeon Battle.

“Oh, and while you’re here, could I ask you to buy a [Summon Skeleton Scroll] for me? I’m sure you can buy it a lot cheaper than I could. In return, I’ll buy a [Create Golem Scroll] for you.”

“...I suppose I don’t mind. Consider the deal made.”

“Perfect. This is basically the definition of a fair deal. Truly, deals are fruitful and wonderful things.”

“I do not particularly specialize in magic, you know. I believe the deal is not particularly fair with that in mind, no?”

While we were at it, we also got scrolls for Mikan so he could prepare monsters even if Aidy and I were both away somewhere. Though, by scrolls I mean exclusively a Skeleton scroll.

And let me say that it was pretty cute to see Aidy ruffling Mikan’s orange rabbit fur to get his DP.

* * *

“You are quite skilled with the blade, dog.”

“Thank... you... very... much...! Haaah...!”

The air was filled with the smacking sound of hard wood hitting hard wood, just as it had been ever since Aidy and Niku started their training duel. Camping out in the back end of a dark cave just dulled the body. Thus, they were dueling in the wide grassy plains near the dungeon instead, while Rokuko, Ichika, Mikan, and I watched from a short distance away.

“Man, I wish you let me bet on which of them is gonna win,” Ichika groaned.

“Not gonna happen.”

“Tch.”

“What’s the problem with gambling, Keima? Let’s see... I’ll bet three melon rolls on Aidy winning!” Rokuko declared. But it was a bit late for that. Anyone could tell just by looking at the state of the fight that Niku had little chance of winning.

At the start Niku leapt around the field and speedily sliced away with her dual-wielded knives while Aidy defended with a two-handed greatsword. But over time Aidy moved to the offensive herself, and at this point it was all Niku could do to block Aidy’s greatsword, which she was swinging around in one hand. *And Niku’s our strongest one-on-one fighter. I want to think this is just Aidy being crazy strong, but...*

“Did Aidy fight like that back in our Dungeon Battle?”

“I think so?” Rokuko replied.

“Nah, dudes, she’s using a different form this time. Probably swapped from a form for groups to a form for individuals. Basically, unlike us, she’s actually studied a proper style of swordplay, and one with a form for one-on-one combat at that.”

Thanks for the lesson, Ichika. Very interesting. So to sum that up, this

is the difference between someone who has rigorously studied proper swordplay and an adventurer with a rough, self-taught style.

“Hey, Aidy. Are you studying swordplay or somethiiiing?”

“Oh yes, Rokuko. I am trained in the Demon King style of swordplay. In fact, I’m an assistant instructor.”

Rokuko called out to Aidy while she fought, and Aidy casually answered while swinging her sword around. *Today I learned there’s a Demon King style of swordplay.*

“What’s an assistant instructoor? Are you strooong? Are you a big deaaal?”

“I suppose it means I’m strong enough to train maggots into meatshields,” Aidy said before lifting up her greatsword with both hands and swinging down as hard as she could. The force of the impact snapped Niku’s two knives in half at the same time. The battle was over.

“Now then, how about you grovel on the floor and lick my shoes? It is the loser’s duty to plead for the victor’s mercy,” Aidy taunted.

“.....” Niku glanced my way. *Yeah, that’s her asking for my permission to lick Aidy’s shoes. As a beastkin she’s taking her loss pretty seriously. I’m just gonna go ahead and stop her.*

“Drop it, Aidy. This is just a mock duel. She’d get sick if she licked your shoes every time she lost.”

“My, my, Rokuko’s Master. You certainly are the kind one. Is that why this dog is a defanged pet that can at best give harmless love bites? What, are you saying you will lick my feet in her stead?”

“I would honestly love to, but Rokuko’s right here, so, y’know...”

“...Ah, yes. It would be quite shameless for me to indulge in such behavior in front of my arch enemy. I let old habits get the best of me here,” Aidy said while covering her mouth with a hand and cackling, perhaps to hide her embarrassment. *I honestly might have nodded if Rokuko weren’t watching. Oh, but she would’ve taken her shoes off first, okay?*

“You’re pretty strong, Aidy. Oh, and Keima. I won the bet! You owe me three melon rolls!” Rokuko stuck her hand out proudly.

“Just to be clear, nobody bet against you, so you didn’t actually win anything. I don’t mind tossing some melon rolls your way, though.” I gave her three melon rolls. They were handmade by Kinue and part of the stash I kept in {Storage}. They had been put away right after being baked, so the incredibly tasty scent of melon rolls filled the air as soon as I took them out. *Time stopping in {Storage} never ceases to be amazing. I think I’ll eat one too.*

“Thanks, Keima! You can have one, Aidy, since we’re friends. These rolls are my favorite food, they’re sooo good.”

“Oh my, thank you. Hm... Would you mind poisoning it first?”

“No way! What are you even saying? Friends don’t poison each other.”

“That’s too bad. If you had declared war on me here I could have launched right into a fun duel... Nm, these are good.”

Rokuko and Aidy nommed away at their melon rolls. *Honestly, they do look like normal friends right now. Funny that they’re actually like the princesses of two warring factions. With one of them being extremely violent.*

“If I had Grandfather try one of these, he might invade your dungeon to find more, Rokuko.”

“Wh-What? Don’t let him eat any, then! Promise me, as my friend!”

“Of course. I consider this a reward of sorts for clawing my way to the position of your arch enemy. If only Haku would give Grandfather something of this sort, nom... Nmm, truly delicious.”

I’m not sure I could successfully escape from the Great Demon King’s invasion, so, uh, yeah, please don’t.

Niku wiped away her sweat beside me. I went ahead and got a hamburger for her.

“How was it, Niku?”

“...She’s strong. I fought as hard as I could, but... I couldn’t even land a single hit on her.”

“Fear not, little dog, I imagine you have a bright future ahead of you. At the very least, you are much better than the maggots I am used to. Though, since Demon King style demands a body that doesn’t need to breathe, you would end up as an assistant instructor at best.”

Whaddaya mean bodies that don’t need to breathe... Ooooh, right. Dungeon Cores don’t breathe air. Okay, makes sense that the Great Demon King would invent a style like that.

“Speaking of, Rokuko. Would you like to train in Demon King style? We can have duels every day then.”

“I-I think I’ll pass.”

Yeah, it’d be bad for my heart to see Rokuko fight and end up on the verge of death every day.

“Besides, hasn’t Haku or someone on our side invented a swordplay style by now? You should learn that instead, Rokuko.”

“Oh yes, she certainly did,” Aidy replied. “The Empire uses the imperial style of swordplay. I look forward to our different styles clashing in battle, Rokuko.”

“Nononono, my rapier is just ornamental, okay?! I’m not going to learn it!”

“...What hope does a Dungeon Core have if they can’t defend themselves? When all else fails, you will have only your own body to rely on,” Aidy said with a slight tilt of her head. I thought she was

joking, but she seemed legitimately confused. *This must be some culture shock. In which case, since Core 564 is part of the Demon King faction's culture too, he might feel the same way.*

"Hey. Does Core 564 use Demon King style too?"

"Indeed. He is an assistant instructor, just like myself. Are you looking forward to fighting him now?"

Yeah, leaving the offensive line to Aidy will be for the best. I don't wanna get involved in this kinda stuff if I don't have to. Also, I'll need to really shore up our defenses... It's more than possible that he'll come charging in with his Dungeon Core in hand like Aidy did.

"...By the way, how skilled is your Dungeon Master, Aidy?"

"As skilled as me. A little better, even. But he is still a human, so he remains an assistant instructor. And while we're on the topic, don't consider him part of your available forces. Grandfather is training him in preparation of the upcoming Dance Party." So basically, he was being trained by the Great Demon King, the founder of Demon King style himself, Core 6. *But man, if Aidy's stronger than Niku and he's a bit stronger than Aidy, the Dungeon Masters in the Demon King faction must be as battle-hardened as the Cores are... I imagine they have to be if they want to survive over there. Pretty sure the Dance Party that Aidy just referred to is a battle tournament.*

"Aidy, if you're an instructor or whatever, go teach Niku that Demon King style."

"Rokuko, in what way would that ever benefit me?"

"If Niku gets stronger, you can have more fun with your mock duels."

"Oh, that's delightful."

Rokuko deftly led Aidy into teaching Niku Demon King style. *But y'know, I get the feeling that a style of swordplay based on bodies that don't need to breathe won't really be a good fit for her. Be gentle, okay? Oh, and we need to attack the adventurers in the rabbit dungeon soon. Think I'll control some Gargoyles this time.*

* * *

Within the [Rabbit Rest Spot], adventurers had just fought back some invading Gargoyles and earned a reward from the rabbits, along with some fluffy thanks. While they were distracted, a rectangular stage was built in a corner of the plaza. It had enough surface area for someone to walk on it.

"U-Um! Attention, everyone!" came a cry. It was Ichigo, the red-haired rabbit-eared adventurer, standing on the stage. But her clothes weren't that of an adventurer. It was a short, frilly dress covered with flashy decorations. She was dressed entirely like a dancer or songstress in the lead role of a theater play. Which made sense, considering the

stage she was standing on.

The adventurers all looked at Ichigo, wondering what the heck was going on.

“Th-The rabbits wanted to thank you f-for a-always looking after them! A-And, t-today, we had an idea!”

A closer look revealed that some rabbits with their ears perked up were also on the stage.

“I dunno, it’s more like the rabbits are always looking after us, y’know?”

“E-E-Even so! They want to thank you! S-So, I’m going to sing on this stage!” Ichigo said into a voice-amplifying magic tool, her legs quaking with utter terror. The rabbits rubbed their bodies against her legs to ask if she was okay, and she nodded in reply.

“Wait, you’re going to sing, Ichigo?”

“Yes! I practiced with all the rabbits! Right, everyone?”

The rabbits nodded eagerly, somehow understanding her. None of the adventurers found that weird, though, since Ichigo had always been talking with the rabbits.

“Huh. So you and the rabbits are gonna put on a show for us?”

“Oh, Rinnew! Th-That’s right! The rabbits are going to dance, too!”

Rinnew, one of the experienced adventurers that was a regular at the [Rabbit Rest Spot], walked over with a dark grin (though she was trying to give a bright smile).

“...Alright, I’m gonna watch right here! I’m in the front row! Everyone else, get behind me!” she said, standing at the front and center of the stage.

“Aw man! We wanna watch up close too, Rinnew!”

“Then stand beside me. Just don’t get in my way! Got it?”

That settled that. The adventurers interested in the show gathered by the stage, which eventually ended up being pretty much all of them.

“Okay then! I will now sing! ‘A Loving Rabbit’s Always Straightforward!’”

From that moment on, the stage was like something out of a dream.

“I want these feelings to reach you you yooou! I’m a rabbit in love!” Music echoed off the stage from nowhere. Ichigo nimbly danced across the stage while the rabbits jumped and ran to the beat.

“Why are our ears so big? To hear everything you say! Even our big big jumps are all to get to you fasteeer! Our whole bodieees! My whole bodyyy! Is all to make this love come true!”

Ichigo and the rabbits danced with their ears perking up and flopping in perfect unison. Every step and bounce was made in perfect

coordination.

“Moonlit nights aren’t enooough! I’m heading right forward no matter where you gooo! I won’t hold baaack!” Ichigo thrust out a hand, and a rabbit bounced onto it before running up her arm and hopping onto her head. It then jumped off and did an acrobatic pirouette in the air before rejoining the rest of the fluffy, cute rabbits hopping in a circle around Ichigo.

“I want these feelings to reach you right right right nooooow! I’m a rabbit in love!” The melody repeated over and over, leaving a deep impression. Ichigo’s song wormed its way into their heads. And then, it was over.

“Th-Thank you for listening!” Ichigo and the rabbits bowed their heads. Seeing that, Rinnew snapped back to her senses and started clapping. The other adventurers followed in tune, clapping madly.

“Th-Th-Th-Thank you very much! Thank you very much!” Ichigo bobbed her head up and down.

“That was incredible!”

“The rabbits were so cute!”

“It was all so cute and fluffy and cute and fluffy!”

Words of praise filled the air. It was only natural that the cuteness-loving adventurers that regularly visited the [Rabbit Rest Spot] would love the cute rabbits dancing on the stage. The performance was a huge, beloved success.

“Hey, I wanna see that again one day. Are you gonna keep doing this?” somebody asked. Hearing that, Ichigo asked the rabbit what they thought. And their answer?

“Umm... Okay, they’ll do it again the day after tomorrow! Apparently! I’ll do my best too!”

“HELL YEAAAH!” came the cheers. And so, Ichigo’s debut show ended successfully.

* * *

“I must ask, Rokuko’s Master. What in the world were those rabbits doing?” Aidy asked in the hidden back of the dungeon, having finished watching Ichigo’s performance.

“Dancing. They’re part of Ichigo’s idol live show.”

“Idol? Live show?”

I gave a simple explanation of both terms, saying that idols were basically dancers while live shows were their performances. *I would have expected the auto-translator to do that for me, but I guess she actually heard the words themselves. It never ceases to confuse me.*

“Ah, so they’re like an acrobatics exhibit in a circus.”

“Yeah, more or less.” *Right, a circus. That makes Ichigo look kind of like a rabbit whisperer then. Or... I guess in this world, she would just be*

called a tamer?

"Aidy, do you wanna give it a try too?" Rokuko asked.

"...Well, I cannot deny being somewhat interested." Aidy shut her eyes and gave a nod. *Wait... Aidy, becoming an idol? I guess that could work. She's got the looks for it and everything. Too bad our plan demands she be elsewhere.*

"I would like to make my Master perform like that. It should end up as quite the entertaining show."

"Oh, that's what you meant?" *I feel like Aidy's Dungeon Master was a guy... Well, I guess male idols do exist too.*

"Where might I be able to acquire clothes of that kind?"

"...Oh, that's what you meant?" *Let's not force the guy to cross-dress, alright? I know how much that can hurt.*

"In any case, what is your goal with this farce anyway?"

"The plan's to get a lot of people in one place." We would be holding live shows every other day leading up to the Dungeon Battle. Then we would leak news that she would be performing a new song on the day of the Dungeon Battle. The result? A bunch of fans ready to fight when the day comes. Thus was Project Strawberry in its entirety.

"So you will use these people... or pawns, I should say, as defenders? Will they be capable enough?"

"Hey, there's strength in numbers. And even the DP we get from them staying here is pretty nice. Not to mention the money."

By money I was referring to our plans to sell light magic tools that resembled glow sticks. I had already asked Neruneh to mass produce them. She had simplified the design of the magic circle, and golems would make the tools themselves while all Neruneh had to do was activate them with magic. The resulting magic tool would shine for three to four hours with just a single trash goblin-tier magic crystal.

"There's no way to reuse them?"

"Yeah. That way they have to buy more." We recover the used magic tools and recycle them on our own, with it being up to the customers whether to carry the glow sticks home as a souvenir or toss them into a marked trash can. *Maybe we can sell photos too? Nah, I'm not even sure if photography exists in this world.*

"I asked Core 219 about this, but there are apparently, like, woodcut block portraits for people," Rokuko said.

Core 219 was the Dungeon Core of Tsia's dungeon, and something of a drama queen. Though in reality, she was an expert theatergoer that actually wrote professional screenplays. Her opinion was worth considering.

"Guess I'll try making some of those, then."

And so, we hashed out more plans to make money from idols. *Maybe I'll give out a free handshake ticket to anyone who buys a*

glowstick.

As an aside, I tried making some woodcut art, but I was so lacking in artistic talent that the whole idea was scrapped. Too bad.

* * *

One thing led to another, and it was finally the day before the Dungeon Battle. In retrospect we really had been given an enormous amount of time to prepare, and the results were far better than I'd expected, mainly with respect to Ichigo's idol activities.

I'm not sure about the details, but Ichigo was apparently growing in fame throughout the imperial capital as a new, exceptionally talented songstress. I visited the place recently and was pretty shocked when I heard some minstrels singing one of Ichigo's songs. And by some I mean quite a lot of them. Haku was definitely getting involved here somehow. Not that I minded, really. The plan was getting so huge that our front company for DP laundering turned into a real deal talent business, but Haku had given her permission for it.

Honestly, I appreciated that I could use {Teleport} now, but I was so busy that at times I almost wish I didn't have it, so being unable to use it didn't hurt so much.

Anyway, we were all taking part in a pre-Dungeon Battle motivational party hosted by Haku, which seemed to be a tradition at this point. Since Mikan and his squad were the main players this time, she was catering his [Rabbit Paradise] instead of throwing it at her villa. For that reason Aidy and naturally Mikan's squad were here too.

Incidentally, since Haku was basically our sponsor, she was treating this like the eve of a festival. She was chugging sparkling wine (provided by me) and looking exceptionally pleased.

"To reiterate, I really don't care whether you win or lose," she said. She really had done more than enough to help her subordinate Mikan out. So much so it almost felt like she had gone too far for him, since he had just come for her to help out of nowhere when he got in trouble.

With that in mind, Haku probably was being completely serious when she said she didn't care whether we won or lost. Her only stake in this was the 100,000 DP she'd donated to us. Which, of course, was absolutely nothing to her.

Oh, and by the way, we still have 70,000 of that left. I spent 10,000 of it on the [Create Golem Scroll] I bought for Aidy's [Summon Skeleton Scroll]. At this rate, all the rest is going straight into our pocket as a reward. Whether we win or lose, that is.

And by the way, all the DP spent on Ichigo's idol activities came from Mikan's pocket, but since she was earning him back far more than he invested, he didn't mind that at all.

“Tell me, Rokuko,” Aidy began. “Are you truly not fighting in this Dungeon Battle? If you abstain, I will get to keep the enemy all to myself.”

“I’m not. And also, it’s going to be really hard to keep them all to yourself. It’s a Dungeon Battle, so.”

“Very true. You may clean up all the scraps that I miss. We can say that whoever kills more will be the victor.”

“You really love competition, don’t you? Well, sorry, but I’m not playing. My style is more sitting back and watching things from afar. I’m the grand general!”

“Rokuko, do you not know that generals give orders on the frontline? That is just common sense.”

“No, that’s just you being narrow minded. Soon it’ll be trendy for generals to sit back and give orders from safety!”

“...You sometimes use words I do not understand very well, Rokuko. Are they from another world?”

“Yup!”

I was used to Aidy and Rokuko’s weird conversations by now. Really, I had spent so much time with Aidy while preparing for the Dungeon Battle that I had a pretty solid grasp on her character. To sum her up in a single word: She was a musclehead. But she wasn’t a bad person. Really, she wasn’t a bad person at all. She was just addicted to fighting and dueling.

“Heeey, Keima? You eating this stuff too?” Mikan the orange rabbit hopped over to me.

“Huh? Oh, hey, Mikan. Yeah, I’m eating. What about you?”

“Uh-huh! ’Course I am. Tomorrow’s finally the Dungeon Battle. I’m gonna eat a ton and fight hard! Here, have some salad.” Mikan used his hind feet to dexterously pick up tongs and put salad on my plate. It was carrot dense salad. No onions, since rabbits were eating it too.

“There’s some meat over there if you want! This salad is mainly for us rabbits.”

Yeah. Haku deftly accommodating everyone doesn’t even surprise me.

“Heeey!” Mikan yelled. “That’s soup, watch out! Don’t play inside it!”

“Awww, what?”

“It’s not a yellow pool?”

“I was just about to fish out the stuff inside.”

I’m glad that Mikan’s rabbits are joining in on the fun, but playing with the food is kinda gross. Hmm. Maybe they’re kinda lacking in intelligence... Eh, whatever.

Elsewhere in the party was Niku nomming on food, and Ichika tearing through the whole feast like a whirlwind. Unlike last time she

had the powerful weapon known as {Storage} with her, and could bring home more than enough food for later.

“By the way, where’s Ichigo?”

“She’s resting to prepare for tomorrow’s live show. I’m gonna bring her some food later!” Mikan said while using {Storage} himself to secure food for Ichigo.

“Master Core, this too!”

“And thiiis!”

“These are super tasty!”

“Quit it, you three! Don’t just toss food inside... I mean, not that it matters.”

{Storage} had about as much space as a closet inside it, so Mikan could put more food into it than he could eat himself. There would be more than enough room for both him and Ichigo to eat later.

“Hello there, Keima.”

Oh crap, it’s Haku. Her smile is as terrifying as ever. Quiver quiver. I’m no bad Dungeon Master, I pwomise!

“What brings you my way, Haku?”

“Ahaha. There’s no need for you to be so on guard, is there? I would just like to know what you think your chances of victory are tomorrow.”

“Hmm, I dunno. I’d say about fifty percent since I haven’t met our opponent personally.”

“Oh my. I thought for sure you would be more bold and say you have a ninety percent chance of victory.”

“Hahaha, you overestimate me.” *Maybe things would be different if I could borrow Wataru for this. Though I’d still probably give a reserved seventy percent.*

But in return, I was getting the Imperial Guards that would be sent to protect Emmymephy. They weren’t Haku’s direct subordinates, but they were elite soldiers trained thoroughly by Sally. I couldn’t ask for much more than them.

Indeed. The live show for a new song we were holding during tomorrow’s Dungeon Battle would be the first concert that a member of the imperial family would be attending. At that point it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Ichigo was the top idol in the entire Empire... Though it was less impressive when you considered it was all a sham. We asked Haku to send Emmymephy our way, after all.

That said, I’ve seen one of the tough-faced members of the Imperial Guard is actually a regular at the [Rabbit Rest Spot]. And on top of that, they’re a big fan of Ichigo. They mumbled something about an urge to protect welling inside of them when some rabbits rubbed their bodies against them, so I was sure I could count on them to fight hard to protect the dungeon tomorrow.

“Well, ideally I could just throw Wataru at him, but either way I should be able to accomplish our original goal of landing a blow on them. Don’t worry.”

“Ahaha. Even so, I believe in you succeeding, Keima. Go ahead and win if you can, especially since Core 666 came all this way to help. I’m sure you’ve thought of all sorts of gimmicks to surprise me, no? I’m looking forward to... and have been looking forward to... seeing what ideas you cook up here.”

Hey, don’t expect too much. I didn’t really think of any super special gimmicks this time, so yeah.

“Well, I won’t lose on purpose. Though I am trying out some risky strategies here while I have the chance.”

“Ahahaha. I would expect nothing less from you, Keima. Let’s see... If you win, I will give you a special reward. How does information about the divine bedding sound? Of course, I will prepare information you don’t already know.”

“Thanks, but I don’t plan on losing either way.” *Now that’s a little motivating. Let’s take this a little more seriously. Not that I’m going to do literally anything differently.*

“Haku! I want a reward too if Keima wins!”

“Oh my. In that case, I might demand something as well.”

Rokuko and Aidy butted in after hearing something about a reward. *Now that’s what I call greedy.*

“Hm... Well, I suppose I can find something for you two. If you win, that is.”

“Yay! Let’s win, Keima!”

“Ahaha. In what world would you lose with me by your side? Any loss would be due to poor instructions. Use me well, Rokuko’s master.”

Good grief. I guess I should just appreciate that they’re enthusiastic... But wait. Somehow, I’ve got a bad feeling about Haku’s reward. Hopefully I’m just imagining things.

Core 564’s Perspective

Things sure turned into a real mess. Why do I have to gamble my future on a mere dungeon battle? All I did was enter the fringe of Empire territory as a member of the Demon King faction. I was on my way to the imperial capital, the massive human farm owned by the traitor given the name Haku by father, when I fell into a pitfall. Indeed, a pitfall in the middle of a grassy plain. There I found Core 629, a rabbit-type Dungeon Core.

Think about it. A complete weakling, making a pitfall in territory so close to the Demon Realm? He had to be a member of the Traitor

faction. They had attacked me first by planting the pitfall along my path. It was a declaration of war.

Naturally, I could tell just by looking at Core 629 that he was an irrelevant bottom feeder, but if he was a member of the Traitor faction he needed to be taken care of. It probably wouldn't be fun for me to just crush a bug like him, but either way I decided to destroy his whole dungeon. That said, I would need to say something to the Traitor at some point. Perhaps if I said so soon, she would be able to train the dungeon into something more worth my time. Which reminded me that the Core gathering was coming up soon.

I'll let him have one final supper. I can finish him off after that. Enjoy suffering, trash.

...Thinking that way had apparently been a mistake. Core 6 called me over at the gathering.

It seemed that the Core wasn't a member of the Traitor faction after all. But since he ended up joining them, what difference did it make? I didn't get it. All we had to do was crush him. And when I said that, Core 6 let out a sigh that sounded a bit tired. If he was tired, I would hope that he recovered his strength at the gathering.

Or so I thought, before Core 6 suddenly dropped the hammer on me. He said I had no future if I didn't win this Dungeon Battle! It was shocking to hear Core 6 say that directly, but on second thought, I was dealing not only with a weak rabbit-type Core, but one from the 600 batch. There was a world of difference between him and a 500 batch Baphomet-type such as myself. I would never lose.

Truly, someone pathetic enough to lose to a weakling like that had no future in the dog-eat-dog world of the Demon King faction. All Core 6 had done was tell me the truth.

But there, the princess—as Core 666 was known, since she was so doted upon by Core 6—got involved. The princess proposed to Core 6 that she help the weakling, and Core 6 gave her permission to do so.

“Don't tell me you expect to lose to her,” Core 6 said, and I could do nothing but shake my head. Anything else would be admitting my defeat.

...Perhaps this was an excuse to have us of the Demon King faction fight each other and grow stronger. By staking my future on the battle, he forced me to put my all into this, and thereby would give the princess an opportunity to fight me at my best. I could see Core 6's hand guiding things in the favor of his granddaughter's future.

However. However! The princess was a genius even within the Demon King faction, and was well-known as a walking disaster of impressive strength. I was a century her senior, and already she was an assistant instructor in swordplay just as I was. My chances of victory would go from one hundred percent to seventy percent with

her involvement. I could no longer afford to let my guard down.

Not to mention, in the unlikely chance of me failing, my future would close before my eyes. This was a fight I stood absolutely nothing to gain from! Oh well. It is of no consequence.

I just have to win. Even with the princess as an opponent, all I had to do was dominate her and make her my own. Hm? In that sense, she could be my reward for victory. I could have my way with that cheeky princess. Yes, that has to be the idea here! After all, I'm a skilled demon-type Core! I would have to think that Core 6 would stop me after having a night's fun, but regardless. Ahaha! I could do as I wish with the princess. Not bad. I've grown tired of sleeping with the Succubi under my command.

With that in mind, I could work up motivation even for this tedious good-for-nothing Dungeon Battle. Motivation for what came after, anyway.

"Master 564, how do you feel about the Dungeon Battle?" asked my subordinate in bed, a Succubus. She was my right hand woman, one I especially liked and had poured a decent amount of DP into strengthening. Though, lately she had been getting enough incurable wounds that I was just about done with her. "Is Core 666 not our only opponent?"

"Heh, well. We can't let our guard down. But our other opponent is some stupid animal. All I have to do is smash my {Summon Skeleton} against Core 666's. Hm... You know, won't it be easy to make the animal betray her if you {Charm} him?"

"Ahaha, that sounds entertaining. {Charm} works well on animals since they're so unintelligent."

Indeed. {Charm} didn't work well on spawned monsters since they were weak-minded, but most monsters were *very* weak to it. They were unintelligent and lived based on instinct.

I am a Baphomet, a demon that ruled over {Charm}, so a mere animal would pose no threat to me. I didn't even need to consider the rabbit-type Core or any of its monsters to be a threat.

"Do you think Core 89's reinforcements will be defeated by {Charm} as well?"

"...Ah, good on you for remembering that. I had almost forgotten. Apparently she will be sending the infamous forever bottom ranker Core 695 to help. It's a shame that she won't be fighting on the battlefield, since she isn't a member of the Demon King faction."

I would have crushed her to make an example if she had appeared on the front lines. Since she is a human-type Core that doesn't need to morph, I could violate her in human form for as long as I wished without worrying about it falling apart... Hm? I just felt a chill. That's no good. It would be no joke if I lost due to feeling sick the day of the

battle. I launched a {Fireball} into the oven to heat up the room a bit.

I was an expert at small details like that, which made me an excellent Core. It only made sense that Core 6 would give me such a superb reward.

“...A talentless human-type Core has no monsters for me to fear. I imagine a Minotaur will be the best she can do.”

“It would be oh so amusing if she sent out waves of goblins and Orcs.”

“Gahaha! That would be hilarious!” And it was completely possible too! If she did that, we would be able to win without sending out a single monster of our own. After all, both goblins and Orcs were like avatars of pure lust. They would never be able to resist {Charm}. We would even be able to count them as allies from the start.

“Though I should say, with Core 89 involved, she might send adventurers to help as well.”

“Interesting. But even they...”

“Yes, even they are bait for {Charms}.”

They weren’t as degenerate as goblins, but humans were still animals dominated by lust. They crumbled in moments when presented with delusions that made their lusts a reality—in other words, {Charms}. Though they would be able to put up a fight if they were all equipped with anti-charm magic items and had high mental fortitude.

But resistance items were expensive, and the mental resistance of humans was easier to blow away than the flame of a candle. Not all of them would be able to fight. In short, it would be just as foolish to consider them part of the enemy forces at all.

“So to sum things up, my victory is all but secured. I need only to plan around defeating the princess... rather, Core 666. If I am to lose, it will be by her hand.”

“Of course, Master 564. And perhaps the best plan against Core 666 could be found in a bed like this?”

“Heh. I’ve heard of a Beddhist church growing in size among the humans. Their teachings include not doing today what can be done tomorrow. A wise saying, don’t you think?”

“Ahaha. I see even humans can be clever at times.”

And so I laid back down to rest for the Dungeon Battle... when suddenly it happened. I had the most genius idea I had ever had.

“Of course! I just need forces to defeat Core 666!”

“In other words... you will hire mercenaries?”

“Heh, that’s not a bad idea. But no. I need only excellent recovery items, and strong weapons on top of that.” Indeed! If my and Core 666’s forces are equally powerful, then my victory will be secured if I just make my forces even stronger! Perfect! I am a genius!

“In that case, I believe I know the perfect person.”

“What?” It was strange for a Succubus born from my dungeon to know someone I didn’t. Still, strange things can happen. “Are they strong? Do they have excellent potions, or otherwise strong weapons?”

“They have knowledge of very strong, very splendid medicine, and they own incredibly strong weaponry!”

Fantastic! That is the most convenient news I’ve ever heard! It’s as if fate had guided them to me so that I might make the princess mine!

“Furthermore, this person has a weakness for events that seem entertaining. I imagine that they will help for free, if I use my {Charm} a little.”

And they will help for free? That is the kind of attitude I like to see!

“Very well! I will use them in battle! Call them over! Make sure they arrive before the Dungeon Battle!”

“As you wish, Master 564.”

Still, it was best to plan on them not making it in time. Ah! I will strengthen my retained Greater Demons to use in battle. Yes, what a perfect idea! I am incredible! I have all but won the Dungeon Battle already! Now I need only think of how I shall *punish* Core 666 afterwards! Gahaha... Bwahaha! BWAHAHAHAHAAA!

Chapter 3 — Emmymephy's Perspective

Emmymephy, the princess of the Laverio Empire. She had blue hair, red eyes that resembled her supposed ancestor the Ivory Goddess, and a flat chest that did not resemble the Ivory Goddess's. Not too long ago she went to Goren town with Wataru to take Keima and his party to the imperial capital, only to be kidnapped by an extremist Holy Kingdom faction on the way back. She still remembered spending her imprisonment with Rokuko and the others in the Goddess of the Pond's bubble jail like it was a vacation.

...It had been such a pleasant time that despite fulfilling the fortune that she would be kidnapped, she felt as if they had made a mistake, though in the end it seemed to be fine.

One day, out of the blue, someone came to Emmymephy with a job—investigating a dungeon. She herself hadn't heard of that until just now due to the need to prepare guards, but all the preparations had finally been made.

"Investigating a dungeon? I say, that sounds like a bore. Send my body double instead," Emmymephy replied lazily to the guard who came to inform her of the news.

"E-Erm... But arrangements have been made, princess."

"I am presently so occupied with *those* rumors that I have no time for dungeons!"

The rumors she spoke of were regarding a certain songstress—a rabbit beastkin who adorned herself in adorable clothing, danced like a professional, and frolicked across the stage with little rabbits. She was calling herself an idol, whatever that meant.

"Her name is Ichigo, I believe. I heard one of her songs from a traveling minstrel in town, and goodness if it wasn't the cutest song I've ever heard!"

"Princess, you snuck out of the castle again?"

"Th-That matters not." Emmymephy launched into a chorus of "I want these feelings to reach you you yooou!" to change the subject and avoid suspicion. But not only did that fail to change the subject at all, it also proved that she had visited the lower city enough to learn the song.

"In any case, I hear that this songstress is about to release a new song in a matter of days! I want to hear that song as soon as possible,

and if possible, right away! But the songstress is not a member of any theater group, and her identity is shrouded in mystery. Apparently she can only be seen by the chosen furies... But I say, what's a furry?"

"Furies are those who love animals. In particular they love cute, fluffy animals with lots of fur." The imperial knight responded quickly in a somewhat forceful tone. Emmymephy felt the weight behind his words and faltered.

"...Well, in any case, I cannot allow myself to miss any details. I must know the moment news arrives in the capital. Thus, I cannot take one step outside!" Emmymephy declared. Hence her wanting them to send her body double instead. Let's pretend that wasn't more or less her announcing that she planned to sneak out of the castle again to stay up to date on everything.

And that was when the imperial knight grinned. "In that case, I believe you will want to go on the mission all the more. After all, it is in this dungeon that the idol will be performing her new song."

"Say that sooner! Nothing shall stop me from going!"

Emmymephy declared, quite enthusiastically agreeing to investigate the dungeon. "I will acquire front row seats and watch from as close as the physical barriers permit! It is time for my authority as royalty to do something good for once!" she continued, her resolve steeled.

"Princess, do you know how idol shows operate?"

"Do not take me for a fool. I know all about clapping, large fans, and glow sticks!" Emmymephy said with a confident laugh, and the imperial guard calmly nodded.

"Impressive. Do you know about phalanxes and tag teaming, then?"

"Um... Pha-whats?" Emmymephy asked with a tilted head. The imperial guard shook his head.

"These are the basic principles of wotagei, princess."

"Wotagei...?"

"Oh, are you unfamiliar with the term? Forgive me, princess, you were so confident I thought for sure you knew it."

Wotagei was when members of the audience danced in sync with idols to show support. One such dance was the phalanx, wherein you used your large fan to protect the person on your left while pumping your glow stick with your right hand. Tagteaming was switching places with the person on your left quickly, within a single beat of the song.

"...Are you saying that I must learn so that I may appreciate the art myself?!"

"It is a form of support that can only be done if everyone is deeply in tune with each other. And it is for this reason that it is worth doing!" the imperial guard said firmly. He was so serious that

Emmymephy ended up agreeing with his point.

“But does everyone truly know this?”

“All true fans of Ichigo must do it. If you dislike it, you may watch at the back row. You will still be able to see her cuteness thanks to the stands rising in height like a theater.”

“...The road of being a fan is harsh! But should there not be a special seat for me, since I am royalty?”

“No. It is not actually a theater, and you are going to investigate the dungeon. At most you will be allowed to skip a line or two. And incidentally, one must perform wotagei to watch from the front row.”

Emmymephy desperately tried to avoid it, but was cut down hard. She wouldn't be able to watch from the front row if she didn't learn the phalanx and tag teaming.

“I-I say, how horrible! I must learn this wotagei at once!”

“Very well then. I can teach you,” the imperial guard said, which finally made Emmymephy realize something. “Pray tell, why do you know so much about this?”

“All true fans of Ichigo know this much. Oh, and do you have an Ichigo-themed happi coat? You can buy one on-site, but you must wear one the day of.”

“Wh-What in the... I've never seen you smile this hard!”

Emmymephy wasn't the only one eager to go on the dungeon investigation—the members of her imperial guard were as well.

And so they all went to the [Rabbit Rest Spot]. On the way Emmymephy was taught within her carriage the ways of the phalanx and tag teaming by her imperial guards. In a shocking twist, almost all members of the imperial guard knew wotagei, and they were quite fervent practitioners of it. They resembled a dancing group themselves, even.

“Aaand here is where the live show is held.”

“You're not even pretending anymore, are you?” Emmymephy asked. Her guards were no longer pretending to hide their excitement, but since Emmymephy was also pumped up, she just brushed it off with a smile.

In any case, they did need to give the dungeon a cursory investigation at the very least. Emmymephy headed to the entrance of the dungeon, where there were stands and a bunch of people lined up.

“I say, what is sold here?”

“Ahhh, they sell the big fans, happi coats, and glow sticks here.”

“I shall buy them all!”

“Understood! Sir, I'm Emperor Approved Ichigo Fan Club who reserved an item set. Here's my ticket.”

The guard handed over a ticket and was given a box with the three items inside. For a second it seemed like they were cutting in

line, but those who reserved items through the fan club could skip lines since all they had to do was give a ticket and get the items. He had apparently ordered under a fake name to keep this imperial visit a secret, but...

“Couldn’t you have thought up a more, erm, proper name?”

“Hm? Princess, are you telling me you don’t want to be part of Ichigo’s fan club?”

“I didn’t say anything close to that.”

On second thought, Emmymephy was a fan and didn’t really mind that at all. She took her set of items from the box, and saw that it was filled with plenty more.

“Wait, what? I thought you already owned all of these items.”

“What are you talking about? It’s common sense to buy new ones when you arrive,” the imperial guard said with a look of confusion. Emmymephy, without really thinking about it, accepted that it was common sense that she just didn’t know about.

“...By the way, what were those tickets all about?” she asked. The imperial guard had been given tickets after buying the items.

“Hm? They’re handshake tickets,” he said like it was the most normal thing in the world.

“Handshake tickets?”

“They’re tickets that can be exchanged for shaking Ichigo’s hand for ten seconds. You get one for free if you buy a full item set.”

A ticket which earned one the right to shake the hand of the one you admired. It was easy to see how that encouraged more sales.

“You can also get one in exchange for returning spent glow sticks. Though this way was introduced first.”

“Interesting.”

People coming for the first time got a ticket through buying an item set, while people returning got one for returning their glow sticks. It was standard practice for everyone to end up getting one every time.

Glow sticks were magic tools that shone and were disposed of after use, but presumably they had found some other purpose for them. Putting up a ticket reward for their return was pretty clever.

“But wait. Haven’t you all been here before? Why are you buying sets again?”

“To get more handshake tickets, of course. Oh, and fear not, we are paying with our own money, not the Empire’s.”

...Well, in that case, there was no need for Emmymephy to say anything in particular about it. The imperial guards were free to use their pay as they liked. Even if they wasted it, that just put the money back in the economy.

“Glow sticks are technically an expenditure, so you can consider

those part of the budget if you would like.”

“Oh, no, there’s a certain pride in buying these with our own money.”

Emmymephy honestly didn’t understand why that mattered, but she decided not to push the subject. Everyone had their own way of spending their money.

In any case, she decided to take a closer look at the glow stick she had been given. There was a string dangling at the end of the stick, and once pulled it would glow for about four hours before fading. The pulled string could be used to tie the glow stick to your wrist, making it harder to lose it by accidentally throwing it. Again, pretty clever. It was well-made.

“Don’t pull the string yet.”

“I know that. What I don’t know is where these were made. They don’t seem to be from the Hero Workshop.”

“I’ve heard they’re supplied by the Narikin Company. The fans and happi coats are from there too.”

That wasn’t a name she was familiar with.

“Are they a proper organization?”

“Absolutely. They’ve been given official royal permission to operate.”

Emmymephy determined that they weren’t a problem, since their goods were high quality and they had a permit.

“Incidentally, princess. This dungeon has another attraction, one it was founded on.”

“Another attraction?”

“Take a look at this, if you would.”

There stood a sign next to the dungeon entrance. The sign said “There are cute rabbits here. Please be nice to them.”

“I say, what’s this about rabbits?”

“As you are no doubt aware by now, princess, over half of us are fans of Ichigo,” the imperial guard said suddenly, confusing Emmymephy. Seeing that, he continued. “It’s also the case that over half of us are fans of the rabbits here.”

“You are... fans of the rabbits?”

“You will understand soon enough. Oh, and there is a Safe Zone right at the entrance, so take care not to draw your weapon.”

“Very well, then.”

The guard familiar with the dungeon (who was apparently a fan of both Ichigo and the rabbits) guided Emmymephy down the stairs, and at the bottom there was a grassy plain stretching out into the distance. It was a Safe Zone, just as she had been told ahead of time.

“This seems like quite the large space.”

“Indeed. It’s large enough that the performance area and rest spot

can coexist without getting in each other's way. At first it was more cramped, but over time it increased in size."

Emmymephy looked around for the performance area and saw a stone rectangle that served as a stage. It seemed that Ichigo would sing and dance on that stage alongside the rabbits.

"When will the new song be performed?"

"Tonight. May I suggest killing time in the rest spot until then?" the guard answered before pointing at the rest spot. She followed his finger and saw that there were a bunch of adventurers, most of them sitting down and having friendly chats.

"I know this is a Safe Zone, but they are letting their guard down far too much."

"Can you blame them? They came here to relax in the first place."

A closer look revealed that there were rabbits among the adventurers. They were white and covered in fluffy fur. Some of them were fat and round, too, no doubt full of tasty meat.

"They are playing with the rabbits."

"...Rabbits? Truly?"

"Well, this is the [Rabbit Rest Spot], if you remember."

"I say, even I've hunted rabbits before."

"RABBITS ARE NOT FOR HUNTING!" the imperial guard roared before faltering. "E-Excuse me, princess. I did not mean to raise my voice."

"Worry not. I should have known that would not be appreciated here."

The rabbits were pretty enough to be the pets of nobility, after all. Anyone would be furious if someone suggested their pets should be killed and eaten. It would be like talking about talking about hunting birds while someone was in the middle of showing off the pleasant singing of their pet bird.

...That said, the attention Emmymephy and her guard had attracted was all warm-hearted. Everyone was smiling, like they were used to newcomers acting like this. Perhaps everyone went through the same process.

That was when one of the white rabbits hopped up to Emmymephy's feet. It sat for a second, then started rubbing its whole fluffy body against them.

"I say?! This is quite the friendly rabbit."

"But of course. They're so friendly they didn't even hesitate to rub against the infamously terrifying adventurer Tokoi."

"Truly?! Now that is surprising, I say!"

Don Tokoi the B-Rank adventurer was famous even in the imperial capital. He was well known for being a kind man who loved children despite how he looked. But that didn't change how terrifying he

looked. He was also famous for carrying around honeyed candy for kids at all times. But that really didn't change how utterly terrifying he looked. Also, he showed no mercy to his enemies, and was just as brutal as he looked when necessary. Indeed. He looked terrifying. So terrifying that when Emmymephy had gone to see him in hopes of getting candy, she had actually turned right around and fled after seeing his face.

"...I say, these rabbits are incredible."

"And fluffy. Try picking one up," suggested the imperial guard, and so Emmymephy gently picked one up. It was like a small fluffy ball of softness that snuggled into her arms while looking at her with big, cute eyes.

"Princess, I have bought vegetable sticks," the imperial guard said while holding out a cup with vegetables in it. They were cut into thin sticks so that they would be easier for the rabbits to eat. People could eat the sticks too and enjoy them just fine, but they were for the rabbits.

"W-Wait, what do I do with them?"

"I will hold the rabbit. Please feed him in the meantime," the imperial guard said while trading the vegetable sticks for the fluff ball rabbit. Despite thinking that he probably did that just because he wanted to hold the rabbit himself, Emmymephy went ahead and held out a vegetable stick to the rabbit's mouth.

Nom nom, chew chew, nom nom.

"O-Oh...?" Emmymephy gasped as the rabbit obediently ate the stick. "Goodness! Now I won't be able to eat rabbit anymore...!"

"Indeed! At last you truly understand!" shouted the imperial guard in agreement. And as you would expect, the attention that attracted was warm and gentle. It was like they were saying "Right? We all know the feeling."

"...I see. Now I can understand why everyone is so relaxed."

"Yes, princess! Please play with the rabbits to your heart's content! There is still some time before the live show begins!" declared the imperial guard. He said there was still 'some time,' but in reality there was a ton of time. Emmymephy decided to play with them until she had her fill.

"Princess, a local authority wishes to greet you."

"Greet me? Oh, yes, I came here on an official investigation. I had forgotten entirely," Emmymephy said, having shifted gears completely into playing with the rabbits despite her duties.

A female adventurer approached Emmymephy while bowing her head deeply. "Princess Emmymephy, if I may be permitted to speak, it is an honor beyond words to be graced with your presence."

"Good day to you, I say. You may lift your head. And also, no

need for all the formality, Rinnew.”

“...Yes, your highness! If you will excuse me, then... What?! Mephy? What the heck are you doing here?” Rinnew blinked in surprise, recognizing Mephy as a girl she had seen around the imperial capital before.

“What do you mean, what? I am the imperial princess, and I am here to investigate the dungeon in an official capacity.”

“Whoa, Mephy, I didn’t know you were one of the imperial princess’s body doubles.”

“...Well, think that if you like.”

Emmymephy was an adventurer as well, though mostly for show. It was the duty of all members of the imperial family to secretly register with the Adventurer’s Guild that the First Empress Haku created. It would have been more unusual for one of them to not have crossed paths with Rinnew before while acting as a normal adventurer in the imperial city. And Emmymephy was no exception. No doubt Rinnew would have an easier time accepting that her friend worked as a body double for the princess than she would accepting that her friend was the princess.

“In any case, this is a royal investigation, so I expect your highest accommodations.”

“Yeah, you can count on me. I may not look it, but I’m one of the top dogs of this rest spot,” Rinnew said with a nasty grin (that she thought was a bright smile). It left quite an impression. “Oh, and right. These little guys are pretty smart, y’know. They only eat vegetable sticks from our official shops.”

“Official shops?”

“They’re official food stands with vegetables ordered from the Narikin Company. Some people try to bring in unofficial vegetables, but the rabbits don’t eat them at all,” Rinnew said while feeding a rabbit standing by her feet.

“What would the rabbits eat if nobody bought the vegetable sticks?”

“Well, they’d eat some of the grass growing around. That’s what they did before we came around.”

Indeed. Rabbits could eat grass. The plains themselves were their main source of food. Regardless of whether they had vegetable sticks or not, as long as they lived here they would never starve.

“I say, that makes sense.”

“By the way, the bathroom’s over there. If a rabbit starts hopping that way, don’t stop ’em.”

“Roger.”

They even had a section for using the bathroom laid out. If you kept a pet you’d have problems dealing with their waste, but here the

rabbits were trained to not just let it go wherever they stood.

“Is that why they look so clean?”

“Yeah. That’s part of it, but they bathe a lot in the pond over there too. They don’t smell nasty at all, am I right? Bury your head in one of them,” Rinnew said, and Emmymephy complied.

“I say, you’re right! They don’t smell like wild rabbits in the least!”

In fact, they smelled kind of sweet, like flowers. Just how perfect were the rabbits? You couldn’t get much better than having a fluffy fur coat and smelling nice. But the extent of their perfection was actually, in a way, worrying.

“Won’t there be thieves trying to steal them?”

“Yeah, that is worrying. But apparently, the rabbits here can only survive inside the dungeon.”

A rabbit beastkin had translated a warning from the rabbits: They would struggle hard if someone tried to take them outside, and if that someone took them outside anyway they would die.

“So yeah, we’re managing things kinda strictly here. Most of the funds earned from the veggie sticks goes to our defense fund.”

“Oh, interesting.”

The Narikin Company was apparently selling the veggie sticks at a very reasonable price, prioritizing getting the product to customers over profits.

“By the way, there’s a rabbit beastkin that can speak with rabbits here?”

“What, you don’t know her? I thought Ichigo was pretty famous by now.”

Ichigo. That was the name of the idol that Emmymephy was here for.

“That’s her! I came here to see Ichigo reveal her new song and perform it live!”

“Yeah, I kinda figured.”

“I learned to phalanx and tag team on the way here,” Emmymephy said while puffing out her nonexistent chest with pride.

“Oh yeah? Does that mean you can handle raid events too?”

“Raid events? I say, what are those?”

Yet more idol terminology, it seemed. Emmymephy innocently asked Rinnew for details, and that was when it happened. The dungeon was filled with the shrill sound of warning bells.

Royal Audience Room’s Perspective

There was a pure white room. Inside, two regal sofas could be found, fit for nobility. One was white, and one was black. They did

not face each other. They were lined up next to each other, facing the same direction, as if they were the seats to a theater play.

Two magic circles appeared at the same time, and from each stepped a person. One was a beautiful woman known as the Ivory Goddess. The other was a mature man known as the Great Demon King.

Haku Laverio and Dungeon Core Number 6. The two of them were known for their vicious dog and fox rivalry. What would happen now that they were alone in the same room?

“I would say it’s been a while, but I suppose we just met at the gathering, hm?”

“Indeed. Always a pleasure, Core 6.”

...And the answer proved to be a surprisingly peaceful conversation.

The room had been prepared specially for the two Dungeon Cores in question so that they could observe the ensuing Dungeon Battle. It was a magical space cut off from the rest of the world, so high level Cores such as Haku and Core 6 could observe peacefully without helping either team.

Core 6 saw the sofas and sat on the black one without a moment of hesitation. Haku did the same with the white sofa.

“Today will be a fun day, don’t you think, Core 6?”

“Ah, yes. I have been looking forward to this. It’s time to see how your secret weapon uses my Core 666.”

“Secret weapon? I don’t believe I’ve been hiding Rokuko particularly much.”

“Heh. I am referring to the girl’s Dungeon Master. You say you aren’t hiding him, but there you go using your cute little sister to cover his existence up, you old fox.”

“My my my. I think I shall say the same to you. I wanted to see Core 666’s Master, but you aren’t even letting him participate.”

“You’ll have to forgive me for that. He’s being trained for the Dance Party that’s held once every four years. The timing here was bad.”

“Oh yes, that tournament of yours. Understandable, then.”

The two of them continued their friendly conversation. Anyone who knew them would likely be listening with dropped jaws and a hefty dose of disbelief. Usually they spoke in public with frigid hostility, but now there was not even a trace of that.

“How are things looking on your end? Core 564 is a buffoon, but he is reasonably strong nonetheless.”

“I couldn’t tell you. I haven’t involved myself that closely with this battle. Though he did say he had a fifty percent chance of winning.”

“By he, you mean her Master?”

“Indeed. Keima.”

“...What do you think his actual chances are, then?”

“I would say fifty percent. I believe him when he says it.”

“Interesting. I see that you trust him greatly,” Core 6 said, and Haku let out a refined giggle. Hearing that, Core 6 wrinkled his eyes in a smile.

And that was when another magic circle appeared. It was different from the ones that had summoned the two Cores. It was more detailed and complex, made of several layers of interlocking parts, and it was for summoning extradimensional beings.

Through it appeared Father. He had dark skin, black hair, and golden eyes. He was wrapped in dark blue robes and the top half of his face was hidden by a mask. His mouth, which was unhidden, wore his usual faint smile.

“Father,” both Haku and Core 6 said at the same time.

“Heya, you two. Oh, no need to stand. We’re family, aren’t we? No need for being all stiff and formal.”

Under normal circumstances, Cores only got to see Father once a year, and that was through a monitor. Meeting him in person—though not necessarily his true form—was like meeting a god, and his aura was overwhelming. Even Haku and Core 6, natural-born leaders who had spent most of their lives standing on top of other people, felt the instinctive urge to kneel before him.

“I usually only see my kids through the monitor so I don’t scare them, but I think you two will be fine with this, right?”

“Absolutely, Father. This is entirely fine,” Haku said.

“Heh heh. Of course we are,” Core 6 said.

Father snapped a finger, and a sofa born from the night sky appeared, facing the white and black sofa. Within its black texture were twinkly white stars, and looking at it made one feel as if they were getting sucked inside. If he said he had made it by ripping out the fabric of the cosmos, anyone would believe him. Father sat down on the starry sky.

“That is a splendid chair.”

“You think so, Core 6? Thanks. I can give it to you after this is over if you want. Do you want one too, Haku?”

“Oh my. You wouldn’t mind?”

“No need to be reserved. It’s the least I can do, considering you offered up that full-featured massage chair Keima made.”

“I am glad to hear you liked it. In that case, I think I would like one.”

The three of them smiled at each other. There really was a sense of closeness there, just like a normal family would have.

“But Father. Are you sure you’re fine with making a room like this for us?” Core 6 asked.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Dungeon Battles are one of my few joys in life. Not to mention, I think it’d be fun for you two to analyze the battle and explain it to me as it happens.”

“Goodness, Father, there is nothing we could teach you.” Haku hurriedly replied, but Father held up a hand to interrupt.

“I’m always saying this, but I’m not as almighty as you all think I am. I have something of a talent for making things, but well... That’s about it.”

“You say ‘that’s it,’ Father, but there is nothing we can do that you can’t,” Core 6 said.

“That’s not true. I made Dungeon Cores to have lots of types and specialties to open up options for them. I’m sure some of you can do things I can’t. If you can’t do something yourself, leave it to someone who can—hah, though that’s just something someone told me.” Father spread his arms and smiled. Someone told him that? Who in the world could face Father and say something like that, Haku wondered.

“Well, it’s about time to start. How should we signal the start? I kind of want to pop out at the end and surprise everyone this time.”

“Oh my, but your involvement became obvious the moment you prepared this room. Would showing up to start the battle truly make a difference now?”

“Hold it, Haku. That Dungeon Master of yours might have noticed, but it doesn’t look like Core 564 realized the significance of this at all. We should respect Father’s wishes and keep his presence a secret for now. Knowing that a god is watching will change how anyone fights—there is no need for us to show mercy to a fool who could not understand the simple reality presented to him.”

“Fair point, Core 6. In that case, Father, who would you like to announce the start? Do you have any preferences?” Haku asked, saying a generic “who” to include Keima and the others as possible candidates. Though Haku and Core 6 would be the best choices since neither of them were involved in the fight.

“Hm? Hmm... Okay, I think I’ll ask you to take care of it, Core 6.” Father’s decision was founded on the fact that Core 6 had members of his faction on both sides of the fight.

“...Well there you have it, Core 6. This is a big responsibility. Don’t mess it up.”

“That much is obvious. But overdramatizing it will hint to Father’s presence, so I will approach it more naturally. Give me a hand.”

“If you insist.”

And that finished the pregame meeting. Core 6 signaled toward Father with his eyes.

“It’s not connected yet, but here’s a one-way look at them,” Father said before bringing up monitors directly in front of Haku and Core 6. Each monitor showed the face of one of the Dungeon Cores participating in the Dungeon Battle. The same footage was shown on both sides of the monitor.

“Still, you two really are close, huh? I think it would be nice if you always acted this friendly. Though, of course, I won’t say anything in public since I know you’re doing this to achieve some goal.”

“I appreciate your understanding.”

“That reminds me, Haku. Has your investigation of the incident yielded any results yet?”

“I sent a Hero to sniff around, but no changes on that front yet. And in any case, now isn’t the time for that. Goodness, Core 6, you certainly are a busybody. Let’s just enjoy the Dungeon Battle for now, hm? I avoided asking Keima for details all to make this day that much sweeter.”

“Very well then. I’ll get to announcing the start in that case. Father, are you ready?”

“Yep, yep. Let’s get this show on the road. Three, two...” Once Father finished counting down, a monitor showing Haku and Core 6 sitting in the royal audience room appeared before the Dungeon Battle participants. Everyone could see the sparks flying from their narrowed eyes as they lamented being stuck together. They wore smiles, but all the calm friendliness from before was gone—they were rival leaders of warring factions and nothing more.

“Now then. I see everyone is ready now.”

“Your grace! I will offer up this victory to you, the Great Demon King!”

“N-Nuh-uh! I’m gonna send you packing!”

“Heh heh. Good to see you both so motivated. Do not disappoint me, Core 564.”

“Sir!”

The battle was being fought between Core 564 and Core 629. The victory condition of “touch the opposing Core” applied only to them. Alternatively, the battle would end the moment either of them surrendered.

Although last year’s battle had been a ferocious triple threat fight, it had ended quickly after a day since all participants had been Cores from the 600 batch, and they had made new dungeons for the fight. This time, however, there would be a Core from the 500 batch participating. Core 6 wondered how many days the fight would last.

“Keima,” Haku began. “Feel free to work Core 666 to the literal death if it means winning, okay?”

“Err... I dunno about that. I’ll, uh, consider it?”

“What are you saying, Core 89? Or Haku, rather. Core 666, I give you my full permission to stab Core 695 in the back during the Dungeon Battle.”

“A surprise attack! That sounds just delightful, Grandfather. But it seems that Rokuko won’t be fighting on the front lines. Very unfortunate.”

“Is that so? Hmph, so she follows the cowardly strategies that the Traitor loves so much. I simply do not see the appeal.”

“I’m not surprised you don’t understand how lovely my cute little Rokuko is. I can’t say I would expect anyone who loves a brutish girl like Core 666 to have good taste.”

“Oh? I am willing to fight here and now, if you wish.”

“Give it your best shot... Or I would like to say that, but we’re not the ones fighting today. Let’s get this started already.”

“Tch. A fair point. No point waiting any longer... BEGIN!”

And so, the Dungeon Battle between Core 564 and the Union of the 600 Batch began.

Core 564’s Perspective

“No point waiting any longer... BEGIN!” Core 6 declared, and immediately a gate leading to the enemy dungeon opened.

“Onwards!” At once Core 564 sent forth his rigorously trained and carefully selected squadron of twenty Skeletons, ten Gargoyles, and three Succubi. That alone would be overkill for the puny rabbit, but Core 666 was involved in the fight. With this formation, the Skeletons would stall for time while the Gargoyles supported with magic and the Succubi used {Charm}... or they would if there were any targets. {Charm} naturally wouldn’t work on Core 666, so they might end up just attacking with their weapons instead.

In any case, given that a Core from the Demon King faction was on the other side as well, Core 564 expected a Dungeon Battle consisting of them sending out their finest troops to clash in battle. However, there were no monsters on the other side of the gate. There wasn’t even a single rabbit.

“Hrm? What is the meaning of this...? Did they flee in fear of me?” Core 564 wondered aloud, but it didn’t make sense. He hadn’t left the personal room of his mansion-styled dungeon yet.

He looked through the monitor for signs of the enemy. They were in a hallway, and he advanced his troops while cautiously looking for traps.

“Hrm, a staircase up, I see... Perhaps they are at the top?” He advanced a Gargoyle up the stairs cautiously.

At the top, there was an open room. It wasn't outside the dungeon despite the sky. It was an environment room made of grassy plains, and it was filled with stands, a stage, and a bunch of humans wearing identical coat-things.

"Hrm?! Is this a human farm?!" he thought, and seconds later his Gargoyle was destroyed by a single strike launched by a human. It was as if the human had been trained to fight off invaders. Or rather... That was undoubtedly the case. They had all been trained for this day.

"Gahaha! That dumb rabbit had a whole human farm?! No, no, these are human adventurers! I'll praise him for gathering humans this strong."

Regardless, the humans would fall easily to his Succubi. And not only would they fall, they would join Core 564's army. He determined that the enemy didn't know much about how he fought.

"Send twenty more Gargoyles... no, forty! It would be no fun at all if the Succubi ended this immediately, so advance slowly! Heheh, the Great Demon King is watching us. We need to let the 600 batch Cores show at least some resistance before losing... Heh, I'm such a kind guy."

The humans would go from overjoyed to terrified after they finished off the Gargoyles and Succubi appeared. Core 564 grinned at the thought of offering up such an amusing sight to Core 6.

That said, Core 666 was nowhere to be seen. Where had she gone?

"Core 564, there are invaders in our dungeon."

"Hm?"

Not long after he sent forty Gargoyles through the portal, invaders entered his dungeon as if exchanging places with them. He opened his monitor.

It was Core 666. The young girl was wrapped in a crimson dress that matched her hair, and she gracefully passed the mansion's gate on her way to the front door. In her hand was a Magic Blade—her true body.

"So you've come, Core 666! I admire the guts it takes to charge into my mansion solo! Here, have a warm welcome!"

Core 564's monsters, all things like Skeletons and Ghosts similar to demons, surrounded Core 666. But she utterly destroyed them. All Aidy had to do was swing her blade casually while walking, mowing them down like she was shaving ice on water. It wasn't even on the level of proper swordplay—she was just mopping up trash in her way. And in reality, that was the case.

"Heheh, so small fries won't be enough, huh? Summoner Succubus squad, send forth Gargoyles!"

For maximum security, the Summoner Succubus squadron cast used {Summon Gargoyle} from within Core 564's dungeon and

ordered the monsters to battle. And by the way, it was more DP efficient to buy mana potions than it was to summon Gargoyles directly from the catalog. In the long-term, it was more efficient to teach Succubi the {Summon Gargoyle} spell and have them use it. It would take many years for them to pay for the cost of the scroll, but Core 564 had realized the cost-efficiency thanks to more than a century of experience. It was top-secret information (to him; anyone could figure it out if they ran some simple calculations) and the Summoner Succubus squadron was the result.

Naturally, even Gargoyles would barely serve to slow Core 666 down. Any assistant instructor in Demon King style would be at least that strong. However, to advance past the level of assistant instructor, one had to develop a body that didn't tire on top of not needing food or air. It followed, then, that as Core 666 was still an assistant instructor, she would get tired. That was a weak point. She could cut down hordes of Skeletons at once, but she had to face each Gargoyle individually, and that would build up exhaustion.

"Heh heh heh. I will face you once you've had your fill of my warmest welcome and become exhausted. Do not call this cowardice! Waiting at the end of a dungeon for a challenge is the Demon King faction's way! This is strength!"

As an aside, the true strongest members of the Demon King faction would at times heal their enemy before the fight, but Core 564 didn't have the leeway for that. He was dealing with Core 666, a swordswoman of equal rank as him. Any small change could make the difference between victory and defeat.

...A Hero from another world might observe this and say "What, no heal point? This must just be a mid-boss," but no matter.

"Core 564. The Succubi are about to reach the humans."

"Oh, perfect! Time to enjoy the show."

No doubt the foolish humans were rejoicing over having defeated the Gargoyles. Core 564 changed screens on his monitor to see the Succubi knock them down into the pit of despair.

Emmymephy's Perspective

"I say, so that was a raid event?" Emmymephy asked Rinnew while looking at the Skeleton and Gargoyle rubble in front of her.

"Yup. We didn't even have to use wotagei this time, though. I figure there's probably gonna be another wave coming soon. You wanna join in this time?"

"As I am a princess, I shall leave the fighting to my imperial guards." *Interesting that she would mention using wotagei for fighting. I wonder what that means?* Emmymephy thought while stroking the

trembling rabbit in her arms, and indeed more enemies appeared.

“Rinnew! Forty gargoyles, coming up!”

“Roger that! Take a look, Mephy. This is the true form of wotagei... C’mon, lads! Phalanx!”

“ROGER!” roared the adventurers wearing happi coats while stomping forward to the front lines and standing next to each other. Then, they readied their shields and spears. Their formation was perfect. For some reason, there were several members of the imperial guard mixed in.

“I want these feelings to reach you you YOOOU!”

“YOU YOU YOOOU!”

Those in the phalanx stabbed their spears to the rhythm of “A Loving Rabbit’s Always Straightforward.” They were stabbing crazy fast, but not a single one of them hit any of their allies. Meanwhile, they blocked the attacks of the enemies with their shields, and rhythmically crushed all forty gargoyles. All in all, they were the very image of a well-trained ace fighter squadron.

“...S-So this is wotagei’s true form...! I-It’s so cool! And I say, they’re encouraged enough that they could join the imperial army without any further training!”

“Heh, I know, right? I forget who first brought it up, but this phalanx formation is pretty convenient. You just have to swap out the fans for shields and the glow sticks for spears to make it work in fighting a war!”

Those things all had pretty different weights, but Rinnew was adamant that they could compensate for that with ‘the power of the chosen furies.’ *Ah yes, that makes perfect sense*, Emmymephy agreed without thinking about it for a second.

“But still, that was a pretty big wave this time... First Skeletons and Gargoyles, then forty whole Gargoyles? I don’t think there’s ever been a raid that big.”

“Perhaps the Gargoyles wanted to hear Ichigo’s new song too!”

“Nah, I don’t think so. Funny idea though, Mephy.” Rinnew patted her head. That was pretty much the pinnacle of disrespect, but Emmymephy didn’t particularly mind it.

“So, is that the end of the raid event?”

“Nah, the rabbits are still scared, and the Safe Zone’s not regenerating. Should be safe to say there’s another wave coming,” Rinnew said. She didn’t let her guard down for a second when it came to protecting the rabbits. Her eyes were sharp.

And, as expected, the door opened again. But out came not Skeletons or Gargoyles, but thicc humans overflowing with sensuality. *Is that a... hunk wearing a swimsuit? Wait, no, their chests are covered so they’re probably babes, I guess?* Emmymephy wondered with a tilt of

her head.

“Be careful, everyone! They’re Succubi!” echoed a loud voice.

Succubi—dangerous enemies that used {Charm} to control their enemies. Weak-hearted men and women would fall prisoner to their charms and end up fighting their friends. There was no greater enemy to an army.

Since Emmymephy had anti-charm equipment equipped—a Lionheart Bracelet—she was hardly affected at all beyond seeing babes walking. But anti-charm equipment was rare and valuable, so much so that the average adventure almost certainly wouldn’t have any themselves.

“I say, this is bad! Everyone, watch out for friendly fire... Wait, whaaat?!” Emmymephy launched into a warning, but the loud voice that had echoed sent everyone in the front row standing straight.

“You idiots! Ichigo’s the only girl for me!”

“Hmph! I won’t forget that you’re our enemy just because you dressed up as rabbits!”

“A bunny girl? Haha, real rabbits are way cuter than you could ever be! Come back when you’re a tiny fluff ball!”

“G-Graaah! H-Holy shit, this girl is exactly my type! Is it just me or does she kinda look like the imperial princess?”

“C’mon man, snap out of it! How can you not see that she has huge tits? You hate those!”

“Oh, you’re right! What was I thinking?”

...Some of them responded a bit suspiciously, but most of them seemed fine.

There were three ways to resist {Charm} without magic items: One, have passive charm resistance... in other words, have a strong heart. Two, be so deeply in love with something else that lust cannot overtake it. Three, close your eyes and ears to block off the Succubus’s manipulation.

The adventurers here had powered through using the second option—they had used their love for rabbits and their dedication as fans to overcome the {Charm}. And thus individuals overflowing with love showed no mercy to their enemies. The Succubi, with their {Charm} having been blocked, met the same fate as the Gargoyles.

“Thank you, everyooone! The rabbits are super happy too! Keep up the good woork!” rang out the same loud voice from before, over by the performance area where the stage was. The adventurers and imperial guards in the front row let out a roaring battle cry in response.

“Wait, was that Ichigo’s voice?! Goodness! Is that the red-haired rabbit beastkin surrounded by rabbits and waving her hand here?!”

“That’s right! It’s Ichigo, our idol and the representative of the

rabbits!”

“KYAAAH! I say, it’s the real deal Ichigoooo!” Emmymephy squealed and bounced while waving her hand along with the other adventurers.



As an aside, her voice was so loud due to using a sound amplifying magic tool provided by the Narikin Company. It was quite useful and Emmymephy wanted to use one too. She decided to buy one later.

“And actually, I say, do you all truly love rabbits that much?”

“Of course!”

“Heck, I’m going broke with debt to keep coming here.”

“Nothing can defeat fluffiness!”

The furries all gave thumbs up.

“You all love Ichigo that much?”

“Of course we do...?”

“It’s the duty of all Ichigo fans to protect the rabbits she loves so much.”

“Really, would you not put your life on the line for Ichigo, princess?”

Ichigo’s fans all responded with clear faces free of any doubt. Some of them were, indeed, members of the imperial guard.

Emmymephy accepted their observations as facts without thinking too hard about it. And thus, she learned the true power of the front line fighters.

Royal Audience Room’s Perspective

The tense atmosphere in the room had dissolved as soon as contact with both sides of the Dungeon Battle was severed.

“Did you send those adventurers, Haku? They seemed quite well organized.”

“That has more to do with Keima than me. He was somehow summoning them into the dungeon he made and training them over time. I have to say, I didn’t expect them to end up this skilled either.”

“...They certainly are something else. And on top of that, they even conquered Succubi.”

The adventurers had demolished the waves of Skeletons and Gargoyles. Their fighting was efficient and coordinated, so much so nobody would blink an eye if they were called an elite squadron of military fighters. Though their choice of chant as they swung their weapons was a bit odd.

Even better, they had easily resisted the seduction of Succubi. Normal adventurers would have been controlled by the Succubi into attacking each other.

“Are they equipped with {Charm} equipment? Like those coats they’re all wearing, perhaps.”

“No, those are just something called happi coats.” They were

apparently made of cheap cotton, even. Though they were dyed with quite pretty colors.

“Perhaps they are all valiant warriors with storied histories of battle? Succubi charms have less of an effect on the old and withered,” Core 6 suggested.

“No, most of them are actually quite young, I believe.” There were some veterans mixed in, but they probably weren’t even ten percent of the total.

“All blind and deaf?”

“Nope.” They were standard adventurers with full command of their eyes and ears.

“Then perhaps the girl who brought them back to their senses in a few words is a higher level Succubus?”

“I’ve received reports that she is undoubtedly a War Rabbit.” You could exploit a loophole to defeat Succubi by letting yourself be controlled by a higher level Succubus, but they hadn’t done that here.

“...So you say, but in that case, all the adventurers would have to be stouthearted enough to defy Succubi seduction head-on.”

“It’s hard to believe, but it seems to be the truth.”

“How peculiar,” Core 6 responded with a shrug.

They glanced at the monitor and saw that Core 564 was panicking big time. He roared in surprise and anger when his proud squadron of Succubi was easily massacred by the adventurers. Core 6 was exceedingly curious about how one could train a group of adventurers into such a mentally and physically powerful squadron of warriors in just two months at best, but he doubted he would get an answer even if he asked.

“Heh. Your secret weapon is something else, huh? That’s one hell of a Dungeon Master.”

“To be honest, I’m just as surprised as you are.”

Not only was the squadron protecting the singular entrance to the dungeon, Keima had successfully made them fight only the monsters *invading* in the dungeon. Haku hadn’t ordered them to do that, and nobody had revealed the truth about dungeons to them. They were protecting the dungeon out of their own volition. That, too, was Keima’s accomplishment.

On the other hand, Core 666 was doing some killer work in Core 564’s mansion dungeon. She entered the dungeon through the dimensional gate, then busted through the normal gate to get into the garden, where she was easily chopping down Gargoyles with her true body, the flame Magic Blade. She had so much leeway that she even had the time to fake breathing hard and pretend to wipe nonexistent sweat off her forehead. The fact that she was acting was obvious to Core 6 and Haku, but perhaps Core 564 would be so distracted by his

attacking force being destroyed that he wouldn't even notice?

Core 666 left the Gargoyle rubble in the garden and boldly invaded the mansion from the front door. Skeletons and Gargoyles were there to fight her off, but they couldn't even touch her. Core 666 didn't even have to stop her obviously fake acting.

"Core 666 seems to be giving it her all too, hmm?" Haku observed.

"Quite. Core 666 has reached the level of an instructor after all, albeit through a disqualifying back channel."

"Instructor? Ahhh, of Demon King style. That requires one to obtain a tireless body even after learning to human morph, if I recall."

"Correct. Core 666 had that insufferable Master brat of hers order her to not feel any exhaustion. She'll be stuck as an assistant instructor until she masters the technique herself, but in the meanwhile it's quite an effective strategy."

"...Ah. Using Absolute Authority, I see." Haku let out a sigh. She found the Dungeon Master's Absolute Authority over Cores to be despicable, but she said nothing of it. Father was right in front of them. No doubt he had deep reasoning behind the Absolute Authority.

"Hey, Haku. Do you have a second?" Father asked with a smile.

"Certainly. What is it, Father?"

"Could you ask Keima a question for me?"

"Of course, your wish is my command. What would you like me to ask?"

"Core 564's invading force walked right past Core 666, didn't they? I was wondering how and where he hid her."

"Oh. She was just in the room all along," Haku explained. And indeed Aidy had been in the room since before the gate was even summoned. But only after Core 564's squadron had passed her by did she pop out from behind a fake wall that looked solid but was actually just an illusion. Haku concluded that they had used an [Illusory Wall (500 DP)] to hide her. It was quite impressive how she avoided that many foes walking right by.

"I'm sure there's no need to ask. Core 666 was surely hidden behind an [Illusory Wall]."

"Mmm, it kinda feels like that's not quite right. Could you ask anyway? For me."

"...Very well then." Haku connected her monitor to Keima's, having no other choice. She couldn't exactly turn down a request from Father.

"Keima, do you have a moment?"

"Oh? I hope this is important, Haku. I'm kinda busy watching over the Dungeon Battle," Keima answered, talking to Haku with a casual attitude just like always. If he weren't Rokuko's Dungeon Master his

head would be disconnected from his neck right now.

Haku contained her seething anger and asked the question Father gave her. "It's just a simple question. I was wondering where you were hiding Core 666 and how."

"Huh? You weren't looking at the map or anything? She was in the gate room from the start."

She hadn't been looking at the map but Haku naturally knew that. She also knew how he had been hiding her, but... She glanced at Father and saw that he had written "Ask him how he hid her!" on a piece of paper, which he was holding up to her.

"Ahem. How were you hiding her?"

"...Can't say I want to tell you for free."

Haku glanced at Father again. This time, the paper said "I'll cover the cost, think of anything you like." Haku considered what a good payment would be.

"How about... I pay you with a [Lionheart Bracelet], a piece of anti-charm equipment. I have Emmymephy wearing one now."

"Sounds good to me."

Negotiations complete. Father went ahead and made a [Lionheart Bracelet]. It was gleaming with divine power that probably made it a powerful [Divine Lionheart Bracelet] in the end. Haku considered that she was probably paying him too high of a reward.

"So, how did you hide her?"

"Well, it's not that complicated, really."

"Cut to the chase," Haku urged. She already knew what he was going to say anyway.

"Okay. I had her open her monitor, put on a visual of a wall, then make it really tall and stand behind it. Like this," Keima said before making his monitor visible and demonstrating. A wall was displayed on it and Keima hid behind it.

"Um. You didn't use an [Illusory Wall]?"

"Illusory... Oh, the trap. Those are pretty expensive, y'know. Ten whole futons. No need for that when a monitor's more than enough for a Dungeon Battle like this."

Putting aside whether 500 DP was actually a lot or not, to think that you could use the menu and the monitor like that. Haku felt as if she had been struck on the head. Now that he mentioned it, the trick really was simple, and it had the exact same effect as an [Illusory Wall].

"...V-Very interesting. Thank you."

"No problem. Say hello to Father for me," Keima said before ending the call.

Haku let out a sigh. "It seems he did notice you after all, Father."

"Hahaha! Well, I expected nothing less from Keima. But maybe I

should say ‘Hey! You don’t have the right to call me Father!’ or something? Not that I’m opposed to it really, but it would be pretty funny, right?”

“You may do as you see fit... Wait, Core 6? What has gotten into you?” Haku glanced to her side and saw Core 6 bending over while holding his stomach.

“Heh heh, ah, it’s nothing. You just looked so foolish when he said he hid behind the monitor. Pay me no mind.”

“...Did I make that weird of a face?” Haku pouted and rubbed her cheeks.

“Oh yes. Absolutely. Your lips and brows froze in place exactly. Heh heh heh!”

“Very well. I will attack you to the full extent of my power in our next war. It seems that it is finally time for me to lend my Magic Blade collection to the Knight’s Order...”

“Wait, wait, wait! You can’t blame this on me! Am I wrong, Father?” Core 6 hurriedly looked to Father for support.

“Ahaha! You were wrong for saying a girl looked foolish, but putting that aside... Haku, you were absolutely convinced he used an [Illusory Wall], right? I think it’d be nice if you were a bit more flexible with your thinking.”

...Father had noticed the truth without even having to ask Keima, but had Haku ask anyway so she would realize her mistake. He was smiling like a kid that had succeeded in a prank.

“Did you know? Shinobi from his world use cloth the same color of walls to cover themselves and avoid enemy detection. It’s one part of the ninja art of camouflage.”

“...Are you suggesting that Keima is a shinobi?”

“That would be fantastic! Ah, but let’s get back to watching the Dungeon Battle.”

The Dungeon Battle had at best finished the preliminary skirmishes. Only the gods knew how it would develop from there... or not, since even a god like Father was watching on excitedly, not knowing what the future held.

Aidy’s (Core 666’s) Perspective

Hide behind the monitor until the enemies pass, then launch a counter attack... An amusing idea, as far as Aidy was concerned.

“As expected, Rokuko’s master certainly does have ideas few others would...”

One could phrase that as Keima being messed up or skilled at manipulating people, but either way it was a valuable quality to have as a Dungeon Core’s partner. After all, he and Rokuko had beaten

even the legendary Haku in a Dungeon Battle performed on equal footing.

Realistically speaking, no real Dungeon Battle was ever performed on equal footing. Haku had intended for it to be a learning experience, which led to her letting her guard down, and that opening had been exploited. If she had gone all out without lowering her guard, she never would have lost to a member of the newest batch. She was Core 89, a member of the first batch, far above the 600 batch.

In other words, she lost despite her victory being guaranteed, because somewhere in her heart she was thinking “It doesn’t matter if I lose here.”

...Even during Aidy’s own dungeon battle with Rokuko, her Master had said “Let’s use all the DP on strengthening ourselves. We can just play around in this Dungeon Battle and see how it goes.” In short, he too had been thinking it didn’t matter if they lost.

But today, Aidy had no intention whatsoever of losing.

“Ahaha... Haaah, haaah, now this is certainly getting fun,” Aidy wheezed in pained exhaustion while cutting down the Gargoyles charging at her in the hallway as she advanced deeper into the mansion-themed dungeon.

In truth, she wasn’t in pain, nor was she exhausted at all. But she nonetheless breathed hard with heaving shoulders to pretend otherwise. It was wasted energy, but that didn’t matter since she felt no exhaustion. Aidy had made her Master order her with Absolute Authority to feel no fatigue in battle, nor feel the need to breathe. It may have seemed like a ridiculous order, but since Core bodies were built for that kind of thing, the order actually had incredible results.

Dungeon Cores were in truth spheres that neither needed to breathe nor felt exhaustion, and her walking body was basically just an avatar of it. Why would an avatar feel tired when the body itself didn’t? Indeed, feeling that way as a Dungeon Core was nothing but a farce. It was more unnatural to feel the need to breathe at all.

A human being given that order would soon reach their limits and die. But Aidy was a Dungeon Core. And so, she had, without any problems whatsoever, obtained a body that knew no exhaustion and didn’t need oxygen.

“Hmph!” Aidy slashed down a Gargoyle that burst out of a room. She then flipped back her crimson hair and took a deep breath—pretending to be tired.

Why was she bothering with that? One, to draw out more of the enemy forces. And two, to draw out Core 564 himself, if possible.

Aidy knew how things worked. The victory condition for this Dungeon Battle was touching the Dungeon Core. That didn’t include touching the avatars. But killing the avatar removed their enemy,

which ultimately would lead to victory. Aidy had realized this after Keima and Rokuko pointed it out to her at their Dungeon Battle last year.

On the other hand, Aidy's death wouldn't lead to a loss. Of course, it would be a loss for her personally, but her team wouldn't lose. Aidy naturally didn't want to die, but she was in a pretty pleasant position when she could die without compromising victory.

"My my, what a cruel man Rokuko's Master is. This is him practically declaring that he does not care if I die," she said while pointing her sword at a Succubus who was hiding in the shadows of furniture while trying to summon more Gargoyles. She blocked all exits with her body and blade. The Succubus looked at her with a {Charming} gaze. Her desperate resistance was met with a friendly smile from Aidy.

Had the {Charm} worked? The Succubus sighed in relief, which was the last thing she did. A merciless blade fell upon her, slicing her body in half. The Succubus collapsed.

"Aaah, I was charmed and killed her without thinking. I just can't help but want to kill the ones I love," Aidy declared, not forgetting to pretend to have been charmed.

Indeed. She was pretending. {Charm} would never work on Aidy. After all, she had been *ordered* not to be affected by status ailments. No psychological status effects would work on her at all. Poisonous substances wouldn't be effective either since they would be removed by her Core functions. She was exploiting her Core nature and her Master's Absolute Authority to their fullest extent, unlocking as much of her latent power as possible.

The only status ailment that could impact her at all was being blindfolded from the outside. Or, for example, walking into a room with a [Darkness] trap like she just had.

When Aidy opened the door to a new room, the insides were shrouded in blackness. It was unnaturally dark for a room with a door open. One could imagine that even if the entire room were destroyed, a black cube of [Darkness] would remain behind. It was a wall of darkness that even seemed a bit tangible. "Hm. This looks quite interesting, like space itself has been ripped apart."

She couldn't hear any breathing inside the room, but she could feel hostility. There were probably undead monsters in there, or automaton creatures like Gargoyles. No doubt in addition to other traps as well.

Nonetheless, Aidy took a step into the [Darkness] without a moment's hesitation. Immediately an arrow launched toward her. The [Darkness] trap prevented enemies from seeing her just like she couldn't see them. But all they had to do was attack the second prey

walked in, regardless of whether they had a visual of them or not.

All that said, Aidy still swiped the arrow down and plunged into the darkness as if she were dancing. She stepped across the floor without tripping any traps, swinging her blade to kill her enemies one by one.

“My my, there you are. I didn’t notice you at all. Thank goodness I happened to bump into you.”

That was a lie. Aidy had seen all of the Skeletons and Gargoyles targeting her in the darkness quite easily, the reason being that Aidy was in fact a Magic Blade-type Dungeon Core. Some Magic Blades had eyes on them, but Aidy didn’t.

In other words, she didn’t need to use her eyes to see. If *ordered* to see through darkness no matter what, she could. Whether she wanted to or not.

Aidy couldn’t help but smile at the ineffectual [Darkness] surrounding her. “Ahaha. Rokuko’s Master is something else, but he’s no better than my own Master. Perhaps I should give him a reward when I return home?”

Aidy and her Master were abusing the Absolute Authority system as much as they could to reap massive benefits. She knew no exhaustion, she didn’t need to breathe, she was unaffected by status elements, and she could see through darkness while massacring her enemies. She couldn’t be stopped. She was a warrior that never stopped killing.

That was how far a Dungeon Core could go with Absolute Authority. It was the exact opposite approach that Keima and Rokuko followed—with them having abandoned it entirely—and the result was a completely different fighting style. Aidy and her Master were more vicious and aggressive.

Though all that said, when she had proudly explained all this to Keima, he’d just casually worked it into his strategy by sending her out on the frontlines while his forces took care of everything else. That in itself was more than amusing, so it had put Aidy in a good mood.

Keima’s Perspective

Alright, we won the opening. We dominated them, to be honest. They fell right into our trap for some reason.

The Succubi bit surprised me too. I thought the imperial guard would resist their {Charm}, but I didn’t expect the adventurers to fight through it too. I had planned for some casualties but we ended up getting through it with none. Sometimes it feels good to be wrong. Like really, I figured some of the stronger adventurers would have backup plans for {Charm}, but I didn’t expect all of them to resist it.

To think their love for rabbits and Ichigo the idol would be enough... What a bunch of sweethearts, eh? Oh, and what would I have done if they all got charmed? Don't worry, losing a single floor of the dungeon wouldn't be a huge deal. Though I could also have Ichigo turn into a Rabbit Succubus to overwrite the {Charm}. Succuma is not planned to appear. Like hell I would let that happen.

Anyway, that's that for the defensive side. Onto the offensive side.

...It felt like there were oddly few invaders entering the dungeon, but apparently Aidy was going out of her way to murder the summoners summoning the Gargoyles. It helped that they were overall small in numbers, just like Aidy predicted they would be.

"And thus, Rokuko's Master, I have eliminated all enemies I have found," Aidy reported through the menu.

"Roger that. Actually, why isn't he putting the precious summoners in safe areas? Why's he sending them out to fight? Is he an idiot?"

"Oh my. Nowhere in a dungeon is truly safe. Where would you suggest putting them?"

"...Wait, are you being serious?" I said, then glanced at Mikan, the rabbit-type Dungeon Core next to me. He answered while rubbing his furry chin.

"...The inside of the Dungeon Core is, um, super safe, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is." *Whew. I'm not the weird one here.*

"...Ahhh, I see. The inside of a Dungeon Core certainly is a safe area. With your and Rokuko's style of fighting, in any case."

"I'm pretty sure this is just the normal way to think about it, but alright." *Maybe those in the Demon King faction don't consider the inside of their own Core to be safe?*

"The extradimensional space within a Dungeon Core is for storing your collection of treasures."

"Ah, so we just have different uses for it." *Makes sense, honestly. There couldn't be a better treasure room than a Dungeon Core. Nobody can go inside without permission, after all.*

"Why would one put their precious belongings outside? They will just get stolen."

"Yeah, I see where you're coming from. Guess I should expect that much from the Demon King faction... So you don't consider Succubi to be important, then?"

"Monsters are to be used as pawns and abandoned, no?"

In other words, they weren't worthy of entering the Dungeon Core, and that was why Core 564 just placed them in his dungeon normally. *That feels like a pretty big waste since he went out of his way to teach them {Summon Gargoyle}. Is he worried about someone being able to trace the Gargoyles back to where they came from? Nah, he could just*

place them in empty rooms and have them move from there... Eh, whatever. Pointing out flaws in my enemy's strategy isn't gonna earn me any points.

"Anyway, have you got a read on where his Dungeon Core might be?"

"Well. I suppose it'll be at the furthest end of his dungeon—either the top floor, or the basement. And by 'basement,' I of course mean an underground labyrinth, which would prove a little troublesome. The underground labyrinth of a 500 batch Core will no doubt be fairly complex. I expect there to be at least ten entire floors."

Huh...? It took me a minute to digest what Aidy had just said.

"Hold on a second. Ten floors? That's it?"

"What do you mean by 'that's it,' Rokuko's Master? Considering the traps and complex layouts, conquering it will take several days, no doubt. And if our dungeon is conquered in the meantime, that will signify our loss."

"Oh, I think I got the wrong idea from the dungeon being so shallow. That definitely will be a problem if the floors are so wide they take that long to conquer."

"Wait, shallow?"

Yeah. Shallow. Why do I get the feeling that there's a gap in understanding between Aidy and I?

"I mean, what, how could ten floors be deep? The [Ivory Beach] I made last year was ten floors itself."

"...I suppose it was. However, it had only a single path and was quite easy to advance through. These floors will be as large as the dungeon my Master and I made... Er, I suppose you and Rokuko did, ahem, conquer that dungeon too, all the way to the end. In... In a single day."

"Uh-huh. We sure did," Rokuko answered proudly in my place. *Yeah, the dungeon itself was pretty easy to conquer. The problem was that there was no Dungeon Core at the end, with Aidy having taken it elsewhere.*

"...Rokuko. Supposing that we are facing ten floors here, how many days will it take to conquer?"

"With Keima here... A single day! Ten floors is nothing!"

"My, what a reliable ally he is. And a fearsome foe."

Uhhhh, come on, it might take me two days. Aidy's five floors took a day, after all.

"Uh, anyway. Is it just me or does the Demon King faction not really put a lot of effort into their dungeons?"

"...You wouldn't be wrong to say so. Most of our dungeons end up as mansions or castles. The only thing left to do after that is to expand the basement underground. And in any case, if there's too many floors

in the dungeon, how will you ever get the opportunity to fight the invaders?"

Okay then. So basically, they're muscleheads.

"By the way, Aidy. Did you finish conquering the first floor?"

"I've investigated every room I've found. There are staircases leading both down and up, but I suppose they're on your map already?"

"Yep, they are, thanks to you. Perfect. Now, go ahead and set the mansion on fire. You can probably break up the nearby furniture and light the wood on fire."

"...Pardon me?"

"Huh?"

"I must have misheard. It sounded entirely like you just told me to light the mansion on fire."

"That's because I did."

"...Excuse me, Rokuko's Master. Are you insane?" Aidy asked, worried that I had some screws loose.

"Well, I'm not sure if dungeons can actually burn, but we can find out together."

"No, that's not what I meant."

"I'm sane. This is partially just to spite him, but the smoke's also going to weaken any Succubi still in the mansion, and the flow of the smoke will make it easier to find the way up to the next floor. You don't need to breathe and you can see without using your eyes, so it won't cause us any problems. Is it not a win-win?" I explained the merits of setting the mansion on fire, and Aidy finally agreed with my reasoning.

"Ah, so you are sane. I thought for certain you were suggesting we burn the entire mansion to the ground."

"Well, that's the idea. It sure will be easier to find the Dungeon Core if the whole mansion burns down!"

"You certainly do come up with the strangest ideas, Rokuko's Master."

I'll send over some Gargoyles to help with {Fireballs}. Time to burn the place to the ground. This is like using fire arrows to strategically burn down defenses and the like. Why yes, I do feel like Zhuge Liang.

I went ahead and gave further instructions to aid in the conquering. "Hey, Mikan. Could you summon some locusts to speed search the basement floors?"

"Sure thing. But locusts die in no time. I think squirrels would be a lot better, just saying!"

"How much do those two cost for you, DP-wise?"

"Both one DP each!"

Wowee. Guess squirrels will be better then. I used mice in that fight I

had with Haku, so sure.

“Alright, go ahead and summon a hundred squirrels then.”

“A hundred?! I can’t move that many at once!”

“There’s a trick to it. Niku, Ichika, give him a hand. Mikan, make your menu visible so the two of them can help. Also, I’ll probably ask you to summon more depending on how things go with them.”

“A-Alrighty then...”

Niku and Ichika are pretty used to controlling hordes of enemies by now, this should be fine.

“Keima, Keima!” Rokuko butted in. “Do you need me to do anything?”

“You can, uh... Keep an eye on the number of squirrels and ask Mikan to summon more if you think we need them.”

“Okay! Well, Mikan. Go ahead and summon an extra hundred.”

“Wait, already?” I asked.

“I haven’t even summoned the first hundred yet!”

“We’ll need them anyway, so you might as well summon them now.”

“Guuuh, all the DP I saved up is draining awaaay...”

“You have tons of DP from all the idol shows lately. I already double-checked.”

Well, there are ten floors after all. I’ll leave this to Rokuko.

I leaned back and went back to watching over the Dungeon Battle.

Royal Audience Room’s Perspective

Core 666 cut off her call with Keima. It seemed like she would be going to the staircases next, but she didn’t.

“Oh? It looks like Core 666 is starting something.”

“Oh my, so she is. I wonder what she’s planning?”

“Seems like your little sister’s Dungeon Master gave her instructions of some sort.”

Core 666 grabbed some nearby furniture—dressers and bookshelves made of wood—and brought them to the staircases before breaking them with her sword. She slash, slash, slashed away, turning the furniture into an unrecognizable pile of wood.

“I truly do wonder what she is doing...”

“You think there’s a point to this? Seems to me that she just wants to spite Core 564.”

Core 666 pushed the pile of wood rubble closer to the staircase, then thrust her true body—a flame Magic Blade—into it, setting it all on fire.

“.....” Haku was speechless.

“...Wh-What in the world, Core 666?”

Smoke began to rise from the burning pile of wood. Core 666 grabbed a curtain from the same nearby room and tossed it in, causing the flames to flare up. There was now a huge, roaring bonfire in the middle of the mansion.

“Ahaha, this wood truly burns bright.” Core 666 tossed more wood into the fire while giggling to herself.

The wall of flames rose, burning the ceiling. At that point, it was clear what Core 666... no, what Keima was planning.

“I-Impossible... They plan on burning the mansion?! Are they insane?!”

“Ahahaha! That’s Keima for you! He has the craziest ideas!”

“...Most people wouldn’t execute this strategy even if they thought of it, would they? Of course they wouldn’t.”

Core 6 was shocked, Father was rolling with laughter, and Haku was just exasperated. But either way, the fire attack was extremely effective. After all, the mansion was in fact flammable. It was strengthened due to being a dungeon, and Core 564 could repair it with DP, but it wasn’t unbreakable. And while it was hard to burn, it wasn’t impossible. Replacing the burnt and broken parts just made the dungeon look like it was unharmed. New materials were put in place with DP while the wreckage remained wreckage.

Consider, for example, the wooden pillars. The wood flooring, the ceiling, the wooden staircases. If broken, they turned into literal wreckage, wooden materials and nothing more. They ceased being part of the dungeon once they were detached from the mansion, and they stopped earning the dungeon’s protection.

It burned easily. It burned like crazy. Core 666 destroyed the walls, sliced down the pillars, and set fire to it all. The destroyed walls regenerated, as did the pillars. But they were broken again, set alight and fed to the roaring flames.

She tried wrecking the only staircase leading to the second floor to add to the flames. If the Dungeon Core were on the top floor, then the staircase being destroyed would separate the bottom floor from it. That would lead to the bottom floor losing all dungeon protection, and it would burn normally until the entire mansion collapsed.

And so, he had no choice but to repair the staircase. But Core 666 casually destroyed it again, setting it on fire. Core 564 couldn’t let his mansion burn. So he had to repair the staircase again. Core 564 repaired the staircase, Core 666 demolished it, then set the rubble on fire.

Core 666 noticed that the staircase was being repaired faster than anything else, and started prioritizing its destruction. Repairs, destruction, fire. Repairs, destruction, fire—and so, a loop of endless fire was established.

“Oh my. This is quite nice. Somehow I am having the time of my life here. If only Rokuko had joined me.”

Incidentally, if the Core was underground, then the staircase being destroyed would lead to floor two and above losing its protection against the fire. If Core 564 wanted to protect his mansion, he needed to defend the staircase with his life. It would continue until he abandoned the mansion or ran out of DP.

As a flame Magic Blade, fire was quite pleasant for Core 666 to be around. Her dance would continue no matter how great the flames became.

A mansion-type dungeon, Core 666, and fire tactics. Everything had come together to work quite nicely.

“...This just gets worse the more I think about it!” Haku groaned.

“That Dungeon Master must be a demon. He cannot be a human,” Core 6 said. Despite the fact that Core 564 was supposed to be the demon, judging by his actions, Keima was much more of one than he was.

Gargoyles came to eliminate Core 666, or perhaps put out the fires, but...

“Tralalaa.”

...They were killed by a humming little girl. Naturally, Gargoyles posed no threat whatsoever to Core 666. Core 564 was no doubt in a huge panic.

“Okay, we just finished talking to Keima, so let’s go give Core 564 an interview next! Core 6!”

“Sir! As you wish, Father,” Core 6 said while connecting his monitor to Core 564’s.

“Gaaah! Curse you, Core 666! Stop this! STOP IITTT! GAAAAH! DON’T DESTROY MY STAIRCAAASE!”

As expected, Father was laughing on the other side of the monitor as he witnessed Core 564’s sheer panic.

“Ahem.”

“Ah! I-I didn’t see you there, Great Demon King! I apologize for subjecting you to that!” Core 564 said, straightening his back after noticing his monitor had been connected.

“It does not matter. How is the battle situation?”

“S-Sir! A-Ah, this is no problem at all! I will show my true power here!” Core 564 stammered, acting tough. Core 6 gave a grave nod in return. “A-Also, I was thinking of punishing Core 666 a bit after this. That is fine, isn’t it?”

“Do as you like.”

“Sir! Much appreciated. Now then, I’m a bit occupied, so... GAAAH! STOP BURNING IIIIT! CURSE YOU, CORE 666!”

The call ended abruptly.

“Are you sure about that? Letting him do as he wants, I mean,” Father asked, and Core 6 exhaled a bit.

“I have given up on him, Father. I said that because it no longer matters.”

“Oh my, oh my. You’re going to destroy a 500 batch Core? What a cruel Demon King you are,” Haku said with a giggle.

“Nonsense. I am not actively attempting to destroy him; I just removed him from my protection... Either way, letting him do as he pleases will change nothing. He shall serve as a stepping stone for Core 666’s growth.”

Haku put a hand over her mouth in thought. “He is a 500 batch, despite everything, so losing to a 600 batch Core is a bit unnatural. Is Core 564 weak, or is Core 666 strong? I have to wonder.”

“It’s both. I have some bias, but Core 666 is undoubtedly a genius. And her growth has accelerated rapidly ever since she acquired a Dungeon Master. Not that she would be able to beat me, of course.”

It was then that something happened in Core 629’s dungeon. It seemed that the surviving Succubi were attempting to use {Summon Gargoyle} to rebuild their forces. But naturally, all of that was displayed on the map, and Gargoyles on Core 629’s side attacked them. The Succubi and Gargoyles ran while fighting, until eventually they reached a wall.

“My, what a wonderful frontline.”

“That’s it for them.”

The Succubi, unable to do anything about the row of shields and spears in front of them and unable to {Charm} a single person, were all massacred. Core 564 likely had been giving them no instructions. Otherwise, they never would have lost their way and fled straight toward death.

But there was no helping that. After all, Core 564 had Core 666 in his mansion, doing her darndest to keep an indoor campfire going. Not to mention the two hundred *enemies* that had just flooded the basement.

“Why doesn’t he just entrust his subordinates with commands?”

“Considering Core 66’s fate, it is hard for those of our faction to trust even our own monsters.”

“Well... I suppose I can hardly blame them, then. It wouldn’t be my place to say anything anyway,” Haku conceded.

In any case, Core 564’s basement dungeon was being speedily conquered as well. The first floor was broken through in no time.

“Hm... Squirrels, really?” Haku said.

“A brutal strategy, to be sure. Though in my eyes it’s a lot better than flooding a dungeon with water and fish like they did last time.”

Gargoyles probably bought with DP came to stall the advancing

squirrels, but the squirrels easily slipped through their feet and sped on. Magic attacks like fireballs were small and only managed to make small craters in the floors and walls for the squirrels to avoid. They were clearly being controlled by people very used to maneuvering large groups of monsters.

“Keima’s subordinates must be handling this. They’re good,” Father observed.

“...He certainly does have talented subordinates. Consider me envious,” Core 6 said.

“Right? Even I think the same. If only he would trade one of them for Misha... And they’re even better now than they were last time.”

Only a few of the squirrels ended up cornered against walls. The vast majority were, as expected, scattered throughout the dungeon and making fast progress. And in the blink of an eye, they found another staircase down. That was another floor conquered in less than an hour. The pace of their exploring was immense.

“This strategy is as brutal as ever. Core 6, how would you counter this if it were used against you?”

“Hm? I suppose with area of effect skills. Small enemies are troublesome, but size hardly matters when using magic to apply equal damage to all enemies in an area. Poison gas seems like it would be more than effective enough here.”

“Oh my, the Great Demon King himself would deign to use poison?”

“Heh. Demon Kings are the bad guys, remember? We can do whatever we want to win.”

And so, the middle of the battle also went in Keima’s... or rather, in Core 629’s favor. Which speaking of... Core 564 had said something about punishing Core 666, but what did he mean by that? If he had plans, he should go ahead and execute them soon, to keep things interesting.

Keima’s Perspective

Alrighty then. Everything went according to plan and the staircase was now a nice campfire, but uh.

“...Errr, Aidy? Feel free to check out the upper floors whenever you’re ready.”

“Oh my, forgive me. I just ended up having so much fun burning things. Surely you understand how I feel, Rokuko.”

“Um, no, so hurry up and get to dungeon-conquering.”

Rokuko urged Aidy back to the job at hand after she ended up getting so excited by burning things that she forgot why she was actually there. The upper floors had no doubt been thoroughly smoked

out by now, so there wasn't necessarily any point to keeping her focus on the fire.

"Incidentally, how is the basement exploration going?" Aidy asked.

"Oh, right, we're in the middle of going through the third floor. I wonder how many there actually are."

"...Wait, you're already on the third floor?"

Hey, don't blame me. It's not my fault the second floor had the exit staircase so close to the entrance. Though it was hidden behind a fake wall. One of those {Illusory Walls} that Haku was talking about, probably.

"It was hidden pretty cleverly in an otherwise nondescript hallway, so it probably would have taken a long time to find if we were going through this normally."

"Keima's making the squirrels run on the walls," Rokuko noted.

"It's common knowledge to run a hand along the rightmost wall of a labyrinth to find the way. But yeah, anyway, it's his fault for putting both staircases so close together." *There are some things we can't deal with, but we're getting a grasp of the dungeon's layout, and marking down all the loads of traps in the hallways and on the floors.* "We'll stop if we reach a Boss Room, so this is all support stuff anyway. Once we've found the shortest path we can just smash through with our Gargoyles... Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me. {Summon Gargoyle}. Alright, follow Mikan's orders."

"Okie dokie then. I'll put them in a closed off room and send them off to the gate."

Incidentally, it was pretty simple for Mikan to place monsters I had summoned. It was basically the same thing as me placing them back in my own dungeon. It wasn't impossible in the least.

"...You don't suppose I could keep burning things for a bit, do you?" Aidy asked.

"Is it really that fun...? I kinda need you searching the mansion."

"You can just send Gargoyles to do that. They're made of stone and can fly, so the lack of a staircase will pose no problem to them."

"Fine, fine... Gate, open. I summon thee, magic-wielding monster of stone. Serve me. {Summon Gargoyle} Go help explore the dungeon. Mikan, you know what to do with them."

"Sure do!"

I summoned Gargoyles like nothing and sent them off. Yippee, sure feels good to be a living Gargoyle factory. It kinda sucks that I can't do this chantless since I'm being watched, but still, I'm glad this is easier than using {Create Golem}. Just what I would expect from Haku's recommended summoning spell.

"Feel free to summon Skeletons yourself, Aidy."

"Oh, I would like to save my mana for my fight with Core 564."

“Sure, makes sense.”

“Indeed... Oh, and those Gargoyles won’t be necessary. It seems he’s arrived.”

“Huh?” I asked, but instead of replying Aidy did a backflip through the air. A split second later a sword flew through the air where she had just been standing and lodged itself in a wall.

“CORE 666!” came a roar.

“Theeere you are, Core 564. I’m glad you’ve accepted the invitation to my dance party.”

There appeared Core 564. *Yep, he’s got a goat head and I’m pretty sure he’s two full heads taller than Aidy. Looks like he’s holding another sword that’s different from the one stuck in the wall.*

“Aaaah, alright. She’s drawn him out.” *Can’t really blame him for being pissed at us starting a fire in his mansion. I’d be pissed too,* I thought just as Rokuko pulled on my sleeve.

“Keima, we win if we beat that goat thing, right?”

“Well, it won’t be an immediate victory, but it’d be hard to lose afterwards. Maybe it’s against the rules to kill Cores? Sure would be nice if someone could tell us,” I said loudly so the Royal Audience Room could hear, but I didn’t get a reply. Maybe they weren’t watching and listening to the Master Rooms at all times? *Great, now I’m kinda embarrassed.*

“Uhhh... Aidy, could you try beating him half to death without actually killing him?”

“Oh my, I don’t know about that. I might not be able to win if I don’t fight with the full intent to kill,” Aidy replied while clashing blades with Core 564.

“Graaah! You annoying braaaat!”

“Truly it astounds me that you can be so smug over your batch being one earlier than mine. Ahaha.”

Yeah, seems like she’s got leeway to me. She’s acting all nonchalant without a hint of stress at all. Core 564’s definitely got more power here, but he’s so pissed that he’s easy to predict, or something. I dunno, I’m not really a fighter.

“I’M GONNA RIP OFF YOUR ARMS AND LEGS AND STICK YOU ON MY WAAAALL!”

“My my, how scary. I suppose I’ll slice off your head and mount it in my room, then.”

As one would expect from those of the Demon King faction, they were both badmouthing each other with some pretty violent threats. *Aidy, that would definitely kill him. Don’t do that.*

“Come forth, Bloody Ghosts!”

“Gate, open. I summon demons of bone to serve me—{Summon Skeleton}.”

Core 564 summoned red ghost-type monsters with DP while Aidy used mana to summon Skeletons. She then used her flaming Magic Blade to slice apart the Ghosts just as Core 564 blew away her troublesome Skeletons.

...Huh, I guess elemental Magic Blades can take down Ghosts too. Or maybe that's due to its Indestructible trait?

"Um, Aidy, are you sure you don't need us to send you any monsters?"

"No need, Rokuko. Duels are best performed one on one."

And so, I directed my Gargoyles to search the mansion instead. Or to be specific, I had them fly through the windows to get inside.

...I mean, smoke was billowing out of the mansion windows. Who wouldn't realize they were open? Who wouldn't infiltrate the mansion through the windows? Oh, they got inside normally? And we have enough Gargoyles to go into all the windows? Perfect.

Oh, looks like we found Core 564's personal bedroom. Time to investigate. There's some Succubi, but they're weakened from the smoke and {Charm} doesn't work on Gargoyles. Oh, and there's a Dungeon Core... Wait. That's not a Dummy Core. Time to give it a tooouuc—

"Grrr!" came a growl. *Yeah, there goes the castling. He's not gonna let us win that easily. But still, now we know that the Dungeon Core's going to be in the basement.*

As an aside, a Dummy Core could no longer be used in a Dungeon Battle once it was touched. It was part of the rules. And in fact, if you castled a Core with a touched Dummy Core that would count as the actual Core being touched. Be careful!

"Ngh! Gah!"

"Oh, I landed quite a nice blow there. Were you distracted by something?"

"...Curses! Curses, curses, cuuurses! How dare you enter my bedroom!"

It seemed that he had lowered his guard to castle the Core, which was really what he should have been doing in the first place. Their fight was shifting ever more in Aidy's favor. *Hey, my bad for going into your bedroom. But what do you expect to happen if you put the Dungeon Core there?*

"Nooow then, shall we resume the slaughter?"

"Ngh! Cuuurses!"

I thought for a second Aidy was about to straight up kill him in there during the duel, but well.

"We shall finish this duel later! Basilisks, come forth! Curses! They're so expensive!"

"Oh my. Poison and petrification, now those are dangerous ailments."

Core 564 summoned three large snake creatures. Aidy fought them with her eyes closed, giving Core 564 the opportunity to run and disappear into the ether. He had probably placed himself in the basement dungeon.

Alrighty then. Now we just have to clear the basement dungeon. Yep, things sure are simple now. I like this kinda thing. Anyway, time to hurry up and finish this so I can sleep.

Royal Audience Room's Perspective

"I have no words for this miserable display," Haku said.

"Oh, but I do. Pathetic, disgraceful, and so on. Though I suppose incompetent fits him best," Core 6 said.

"Ahaha, you two sure are mean. Core 564 is doing his best here," Father chastised.

Those in the audience room had watched closely as Keima's Gargoyles broke into the mansion through the windows and touched the Dummy Core. The Succubi had run out of luck when they opened the windows to vent the smoke, or really, they had just killed themselves.

"Hmmm. Should Core 564 have made his move as soon as the staircase was set on fire, I wonder. What do you think, Haku, Core 6?"

"I believe he should have abandoned the mansion at once, Father," Haku replied.

"...I can hardly disagree. There was no way out of that situation. Though I can sympathize with not wanting to abandon your home, so I can't say much here."

It hadn't been a mistake for Core 564 to go after Core 666 directly. Not many people would expect their staircases to be broken and burned. One could even say it was one of the few good options for him once the staircase was set aflame.

"That said, it is nothing short of embarrassing that a 500 batch Core could not keep up with a 600 batch Core in an even fight," Core 6 added.

"...Agreed," Haku said, averting her eyes while remembering that she had lost to Rokuko and Keima in an even fight before. Father watched that with a grin.

"Putting that aside, which of them do you think will win now, Core 6?"

"A good question. I would say there remains a chance for a stunning turnabout, but things are clearly not in Core 564's favor. I imagine it will be hard for him to win at this point. It also remains to be seen how Core 666 will finish him off."

Core 6 thus determined that if Core 564 didn't have a trump card,

the best he could do from then on was buy time.

“Okay, let’s see what Core 564 thinks. Looks like he’s calmed down now that he’s at the bottom of his dungeon.”

“Sir! As you wish,” Core 6 stated before connecting his monitor with Core 564’s. There they saw Core 564 punching a Succubus’s stomach with a furious expression on his face.

“Curses! Why is this happening to me?! There’s only three 600 batch Cores on their side!”

“I see you are in a panic, Core 564.”

“Ah! I-I didn’t see you there, Core 6! Forgive me for subjecting you to that.”

“Did that Succubus commit any grave errors?”

“No, not at all. She just exists to be punched, of course.”

“I see.”

Core 6 was unfazed, since the weak being dominated by the strong was the way of the Demon King faction. Haku grimaced beside him, Reason being, a happy smile had drifted on the Succubus’s face as she was being beaten, like she was overjoyed by the violence inflicted on her. That reminded her of something unpleasant.

“In any case, what do you intend to do now?”

“Sir! Of course, I will launch a successful counterattack. They have somehow reached the third floor already, but all their monsters are weak and pose no threat on their own. They will never be able to defeat the elite soldiers guarding the staircase to the sixth floor—my own Four Heavenly Kings! Not to mention the greatest [Gate of Wisdom] I have ever conceived protecting the fourth floor. They will never reach me!”

“Fascinating. You must have prepared some very deadly monsters and very devious puzzles.”

“But of course! I predict that I will be able to calmly watch on in safety while they are unable to do anything. Once I’ve weathered their pathetic attack, I just need to boldly launch my counteroffensive!”

Core 6 doubted things would go that well for him. Haku confirmed to herself that the battle was already over. Father just listened on with a smile.

“...Do not disappoint me with any more pathetic displays, understood?”

“...Ah! Y-Yes sir! I will obtain victory without fail!”

Despite already having the full intention of cutting him off, Core 6 misled him before cutting off the call.

“...What was with that ‘don’t disappoint me’ bit at the end there, hmm?” Haku asked.

“Oh, I don’t want to hear it. He’s doomed no matter what I say.”

“Given how one-sided things have been, you’re not wrong.” Haku

let out a sigh, and Father took the opportunity to ask her a question with a smile.

“So, Haku. How much of a challenge do you think the [Gate of Wisdom] and Four Heavenly Kings will pose to Keima?”

“The battle will be done by tomorrow by the latest, Father,” Haku said flatly.

“Interesting. You seem pretty confident about that. Any reason why?”

“First of all, it didn’t even take half a day for things to get to this point. Secondly, now that Core 564 has abandoned the mansion itself, they can focus their attack on the basement dungeon. On top of that, unless the Four Heavenly Kings are stronger than Core 564, they won’t be able to stop Core 666. Even if they are unnaturally strong, it won’t be hard for Keima to think of a way to bring them down.”

“What about the [Gate of Wisdom]? Core 564 seemed pretty proud of it.”

“I’m not even sure if we should be factoring that into the equation, but either way, it’s hard to imagine him beating Keima in a battle of wits, and given how proud he was of it, the floor itself is unlikely to be particularly large on its own,” Haku said. That reminded her of a bad memory, and she shut her eyes with her brows furrowed.

“So we can think of this as the final stage of the fight?”

“Yes. If things go quickly, the battle might be over by the end of the day. Keima’s finished all of his Dungeon Battles within a single day so far, it seems.”

Thinking back, it was a bit... no, it was very abnormal that Keima had won all of his Dungeon Battles. According to him, he just wanted to get these tedious wastes of sleeping time over as soon as possible, but the fact he actually managed to win them in a single day was outright abnormal.

“Hold on a moment, Haku,” Core 6 interjected. “Perhaps it’s less that the Dungeon Master can win in a day, and more that he can only fight for a day?”

“Well, Keima is a human, so he does need his rest.”

“Considering that from another angle, would it not mean that if you can survive until he needs to sleep, an opportunity for victory will arise?”

“Not a chance.”

Rokuko and Core 629 would be there while Keima was resting, not to mention Core 666. There being three Dungeon Cores may make one think of the losing Dragon King team from last year, but Rokuko was among them, and she had Keima’s approval as a strategist now. Considering how much Rokuko had been growing as of late, it was

unlikely she would ever be outmatched by Core 564.

“...Not a chance.”

“You didn’t need to say it twice. In any case, with that settled, I suppose I’ll just enjoy the comical sight of Core 564’s failure,” Core 6 said while settling into his sofa.

“I shall do the same,” Haku replied before taking a cream soda out of {Storage} and bringing it to her lips.

“Haku? You sure are eating... drinking(?) that with a lot of enthusiasm. What is it?”

“Oh my. You aren’t familiar with this, Father? It’s known as cream soda. Keima gave it to me in return for lending him some of my forces. Ahem... And no, you can’t have it.”

“Please, won’t you reconsider?!”

“Why not just make one yourself? I’m sure you are more than capable of that.”

“What would be the point, then? Come on, Haku, please.”

“Very well then. Just know that you will owe me a favor after this.”

For whatever reason, Father enjoyed the cream soda handed over to him quite a lot. Core 6 watched on enviously, but he was never given a sip.

Keima’s Perspective

As the dungeon conquest advanced, we came across several obstacles that my oh-so-beloved human wave tactics couldn’t overcome. One of them was a [Gate of Wisdom], and unlike my fake Golem-made [Gate of Wisdom], it was an iron wall made directly stronger by the simplicity of the answer. Unless it was literally unsolvable, it would be beyond our means to just destroy it with normal squirrels, leaving us with no chance but to solve the puzzle.

“Keima, about the [Gate of Wisdom].”

“Yeah? Bit too much for just squirrels to get through, huh?”

“No, I kinda already broke through it.”

Rokuko had solved the puzzle without me needing to even look at it. *Man, what an easy job for me.*

“Wow. What was the puzzle?”

“It was just a normal quiz, actually. With multiple choice answers attached. I got through it in three goes.”

Is Core 564 stupid? With multiple choices, we can get through just by answering as many times as there are choices.

Now, a normal adventurer would only get one chance to answer, since a wrong choice would mean death. And while I could appreciate how mentally straining that would be for them, this was a Dungeon

Battle. We had as many pawns as we needed.

Rokuko just charged it down, and with the noble sacrifice of two squirrels solved the problem without even having to think about it. And since we had over a hundred and thirty squirrels left, it didn't even hurt to do that.

As an aside, the question was apparently about customs of the Demon King faction... or the Demon Realm, that is. The answer was simple enough if you did a little research, but adventurers would never know the answers on their own, so there was a high chance of them dying when trying to get through the gate. And since the dungeon itself was in the Demon Realm, the [Gate of Wisdom] functioned properly with that kind of question.

"Wowee, that was something else," Core 629 said. "Rokuko, you sure didn't hesitate to lead those squirrels to their death."

"Ahaha, that's because I'm a great Dungeon Core! I'm rank 180, after all! The second highest of all the 600 batch!"

Yeah, that sure is a lot of growth from the very bottom rank.

"Honestly, it's his fault for letting the squirrels ask one at a time. He should have worked around that," Rokuko noted.

"He probably made it thinking about a single adventurer or a single party coming for him... Y'know, I think I've got a grasp on how the Demon King faction operates now."

Regardless, this was a huge letdown. I'd gone out of my way to teach the adventurers the ancient phalanx formation by calling it wotagei since we were dealing with a 500 batch Core here, but man... *Maybe I should go ahead and return the Safe Zone to the rabbit dungeon already.* Seems like they're about to investigate why the ambush was extra big and why it's still in danger mode over there, so yeah. Nothing good would come from them finding the gate in the lower levels, though I guess Ichigo and the rabbits could stop them for me.

The basement dungeon exploration on the other hand was proceeding smoothly. We conquered the fifth floor and moved on to the sixth. Aidy was advancing through it leisurely along the shortest path to each staircase, and was just reading the [Gate of Wisdom].

Aidy looked at the still-open door, along with the question attached to it. "The structure of a human farm is... Hmm. I see what he was going for here. I would think that only a member of the Demon King faction would know the answer to this, Rokuko. I'm impressed you managed to solve it."

"Eheh. It was a piece of cake."

"My my! Did you take an interest in me and research my culture's customs? It does make sense to want to learn more about your archenemy, I agree. I'm so glad to hear you say that."

"O-Of course! Eheh!"

Wrong move, Rokuko. Now you're gonna be in trouble if she asks you about the Demon King faction later.

"Oh, looks like we found the floor six Boss Room. Good luck with him, Aidy."

"Aha, just leave him to me."

"If you don't hurry, I'll beat him first."

"Now that might be even more fun. I do want to see how you fight... But either way, I must hurry."

It's good to have allies that are strong in a fight, I thought before noticing that Niku was looking at me like she wanted to say something.

"....."

"Hm? What's up, Niku?"

"...Should I go fight too?" Niku asked, her wagging tail showing that she was really eager to go.

"Nah, focus on controlling the squirrels for now." *I rely on Niku a lot in our normal lives, but this is a Dungeon Battle. Niku's pretty good at controlling like a hundred squirrels at once, so leaving her to that is for the best.*

Anyway. How's the Boss Room looking?

"...Ah."

"Hm? Something up, Rokuko?"

"Umm, sorry, I kinda beat it already. Let's move on to the next floor."

Uhhh... She beat it before I could even look at the Boss Room? Seriously?

"What kind of boss was it?"

"A Black Minotaur. He was saying something about being the first of the Four Heavenly Kings, but I stuffed a squirrel in his throat and that was that."

Oh, alright. She used the suffocation strat I used on Haku back in the day. Can't really blame her there. She knew how to kill Minotaurs and she just went through the motions. Nothing wrong there. The Black in its name probably signifies it having an elemental affinity of some kind, but it was its own fault for having a weakness like needing to breathe to survive.

"Since he said there's Four Heavenly Kings, does that mean there's three more bosses?"

"Sharp thinking, Mikan. I had the same thought."

"Oh wow, we're already on the next floor," Rokuko said. "And it looks like there's basically nothing but the Boss Room on this floor? I hope the next three are like this, it would make things a lot faster."

Apparently the sixth floor just had a rest spot and a Boss Room. Aaand we found the seventh floor's Boss Room in no time. *I guess floors six through nine are dedicated to boss fights with the Four Heavenly*

Kings, and then Core 564 is just chilling on the tenth floor? It's a boss rush that doesn't need any exploration. Sooo... I guess we can just leave the rest to Aidy?

"Anyway, let's see what this second Heavenly King is all about. I didn't get to see the first one in time, so yeah."

"Uh-huh. Niku, Ichika. Control thirty squirrels each and take a peek inside."

"Okay."

"Roger that, girl."

"I-I'm gonna control ten of them too!" stammered out Mikan. He didn't seem very confident about it, but this was in fact his Dungeon Battle after all. Really, I wouldn't have minded him working a bit harder, even. But either way, I decided to just watch over this part without giving any orders myself. It was pretty likely none of the squirrels would be needed after this point anyway.

The squirrels slid into the room, and there was a Ghost.

"S... S-So you've finally arrived! I am one of the Four Heavenly Kings, Hiniere of Wrath!" The Ghost introduced himself to the squirrels, with a little stumbling. Or rather, it was safe to say that he was talking to us through the squirrels. Otherwise he would have to be a pretty lonely Ghost, just outright talking to squirrels that came by his room.

"Tonde was... was a real idiot, always bragging to us about how strong he was, but I never thought he would be massacred like that! Still, don't expect that to work on me! I'm a Ghost!"

...A Ghost, huh. Yeah, kinda hard to imagine squirrels beating him.

"Everyone, retreat to the rest spot!" Rokuko's decision was swift.

"Okay."

"You got it."

"Okie dokie."

"Wha?! H-Hey, where are you all going?!"

The squirrels smoothly returned to the room they were just in.

"I-I-I'm not gonna let you get away! Don't think you can escape when I can pass through walls, you animals!" the Ghost yelled while chasing after them. He passed through the walls, going all the way to the rest spot... thereby deactivating the Boss Room by leaving it.

"Oh wow. He's kinda dumb, huh?" Rokuko observed.

"I guess he's the real idiot!" Mikan agreed.

They then split the squirrels into two groups, with one leading the ghost off while the other passed through the empty Boss Room. A single adventurer or a single party would probably have a real hard time with a Ghost that can suddenly pop out of walls and chase them out of a Boss Room, but well, that wasn't us. Either he was completely ignoring that this was a Dungeon Battle, or he wasn't equipped to

change his line of thinking... Well, either way, Aidy could slice him in half with her flame Magic Blade, so we could just ignore him.
Onwaaards.

The next floor had a Boss Room right after the staircase, as expected. Inside was the third of the Four Heavenly Kings.

“Avoiding Hiniere to come here was clever. I am Natsuno of Sorrow, one of the Four Heavenly Kings. But I don’t want to suffocate to death from a squirrel crawling into my throat, so I will open the way for you! Please spare me!”

The third of the Four Heavenly Kings was a Succubus, but she caved in immediately and refused to fight. *Was she not ordered to fight to the death or anything...? Should dungeon monsters really be ignoring direct orders?*

“To be honest, I have no chance of winning here. I might be able to {Charm} a human, but squirrels? And a whole swarm of them? No way. Oh, and I actually came from outside the dungeon. I’m not a dungeon monster or anything, so I don’t need to obey any orders. Actually, like, I’m done here. I’m leaving for good. Now, go on ahead. Don’t let me hold you back.”

W-Well, if that’s how it is, I guess we don’t need to go out of our way to kill her. We went ahead and passed through. But leaving for good, huh? I never thought about a monster really doing that before.

We advanced to the next floor while Natsuno saw us off with a smile. *Pretty good progress. Guess the last of the Four Heavenly Kings is up. Unless there’s five? I hope not.*

And thus, floor nine. Before us stood the fourth of the Four Heavenly Kings.

“To think you would come this far... I am the final member of the Four Heavenly Kings, Mousse of Bliss! Don’t expect to suffocate me when I can transform into a throng of bats! Now, come at me! I will swipe you away with my claws and fangs!”

Oh, a Vampire! It’s a Vampire! Yeah, it would be hard to suffocate a throng of bats, for sure. No way does he have his attack power set to 0 like good ol’ Rei back home, so this might just be a hard foe for us.

“So, Keima. Which do you think would be stronger: a throng of bats or a throng of squirrels? Keeping in mind the layout of the Boss Room,” Rokuko said.

“Uh... Why don’t you give fighting a shot and see?”

“I think I will.”

A Vampire strong enough to be the last of Core 564’s personal Four Heavenly Kings must have all sorts of powers like changing into mist and wolves on top of the bats. Right...?

“Leave this to me! The Bouncy Bouncy Attack will work just fine with squirrels!”

“The squirrels are leaping off each other and gaining incredible height?! GRAAAAH! NOOOOOO!”

...I kinda feel bad for the Vampire, honestly.

Core 564's Perspective

“Nonsense nonsense nonsense! None of this makes any sense!” roared Core 564 as he sat on the throne in the tenth floor's Boss Room. His pride and joy, the [Gate of Wisdom] (a quiz with fifty-two choices provided) had been conquered with only the deaths of two squirrels, and all four of his Four Heavenly Kings had been defeated in various ways. Tonde of Joy. An Evil Minotaur that disguised itself as a Black Minotaur so that enemies would first rejoice at his weakness, only to have their dreams shattered. He was a model demon who used his enormous power to crush his foes with a smile. However, in this case a squirrel got in his throat before he could reveal himself, suffocating him to death.

Hiniere of Wrath. A vengeful Berserk Ghost that could pass through walls and chase invaders to the ends of the world, giving them no escape. However, he got so mad that he chased the squirrels out of the Boss Room, allowing a different group of them to pass right through.

Natsuno of Sorrow. A High Succubus that loved to create sorrow by {Charming} only half of a party, then bringing them back to their senses after they had killed their allies. She declined to fight and abandoned the dungeon.

And finally, Mousse of Bliss, the last wall of the Four Heavenly Kings. He was a Demon Vampire born from a fusion of demon and Vampire blood, and with his extreme stats he should have won any fight easily. However, while he managed to avoid suffocating by transforming into a throng of bats, he was immediately swarmed by a sea of squirrels. Each bat was pulled apart and stopped from fusing back together. When in bat form, he was no Vampire or demon, he was just a throng of ordinary bats. He would no doubt be dead soon.

“Curses! They're all pathetic weaklings that couldn't even beat mere squirrels...!”

How had a group of weak monsters with nothing but numbers to their name caused so much chaos? A swarm of squirrels should have been no problem at all if each of the Four Heavenly Kings had protected their boss rooms properly. Core 564 had expected that, and thus had not planned for their defeat.

“Now I have no choice but to fight them myself...!” Core 564 stomped his feet to the ground and rose up from the chair.

“Excuse meee. I was called to be a bodyguard or somethiiiing?”

came a sudden voice out of nowhere. Core 564 looked and saw a black haired, red eyed nun standing casually nearby.

“Who the hell are you?!”

“Just a passing Beddhist nun. A Succubus here asked me to take up a bodyguard job. Don’t tell me you forgot.”

“A bodyguard... Ah! Right, I forgot about that plan!”

Core 564 had hurriedly hired a bodyguard right before the Dungeon Battle began. He needed all the manpower for fighting Core 666 that he could get. He had ordered the Succubus that suggested the idea to acquire her services, then spent DP in upgrading the demon retainers on either side of his throne from Greater Demons to Archdemons. But where had she gotten inside, and why was she just coming now?

“What could a weak human like you ever hope to do?!” roared the two Archdemons before charging the nun. The red-eyed Archdemon Metter was capable of casting the High-Rank Fire spell {Fire Pillar}, while the yellow-eyed Archdemon Yatara was capable of casting the High-Rank Lightning spell {Thunder Pillar}. Both were area of effect attacks that would fry lowly rats in an instant. Of course, that included weak human nuns as well.

...If they were actually weak humans, that is.

“Oh, what, testing my strength? Hyah!” the nun said casually before taking out a strange weapon—a cleaver with its blade made of chains that were spinning in a loop while making a loud gravely sound—and swinging it. Core 564 blinked. And the next thing he saw was his Archdemons ripped into chunks, each cut so clean there wasn’t even any blood.

“...What?”

Nobody could blame Core 564 for his dumbfounded reaction. Archdemons were in fact skilled enough to hold a rank in Demon King style, and they were strong enough for Core 564 to consider them his left and right hand men respectively. And yet, they were torn to pieces in the blink of an eye, after a silly sounding “Hyah.” The Archdemon chunks were scattered across the floor like the Boss Room was a slaughterhouse.

“This is called a chainsaw. If you’re lucky it might even manage to rip a god apart! Aha. I made it myself. And now, hyah!”

In another blink of an eye, the Archdemon chunks had been turned into potion bottles full of liquid.

“What in the... What? Where did Metter and Yatara... Th-The archdemons, where did they go?!”

“Well. Right here, can’t you see?” The nun gave a cute smile and gestured at the potions, as if encouraging him to take them.

“Wh-What are you saying?!”

“This is stomach pain medicine, this is cold medicine, and this is headache medicine. This is just a normal potion, and this is a mana potion. This is a berserk potion. These are fire and electric bombs, while this is a pill that boosts defense. Ahaha, Archdemons sure make for good potion material, don’t they?”

Potion material. Hearing that, Core 564 felt the blood drain from his face.

This woman hadn’t viewed the Archdemons as enemies, or even living beings. She saw them only as a convenient source of materials. Just how much of a monster was she?

“You wouldn’t understand me if I talked about drop rates and stuff, would you? Ahaha. So, did I pass the test of strength? I thought I would show you how I’m good at making potions too.”

A test of strength? Core 564 was briefly confused, but then remembered she came here as a bodyguard. With that in mind... he had no choice but to nod his head. She had a powerful weapon, she could craft potions, and she was a strong fighter. Everything the Succubus had said was true.

But she hadn’t said anything about her being *THIS* strong!

“So what should I do until it’s my turn to fight then, boss?” she asked, and that reminded Core 564 that he was in the middle of a dungeon battle. He hurriedly checked his monitor and saw that his final Heavenly King had lost, with the invaders fast approaching this final boss room. He no longer had any choice but to throw this bizarre yet undoubtedly powerful bodyguard at them.

“Seems like it’s already time for you to fight.”

“Oh wow, that’s good to hear. Seems like it was a smart idea to kill time and be late on purpose.”

Core 564 went ahead and tried out the headache potion. It worked incredibly well.

“I’m called the God of Chaos, and I think it’s time for me to mess this whole battle up right to hell,” said the black-haired, red-eyed nun—Leona Shishidou—with a bright smile.

Keima’s Perspective

Having conquered the fourth of the Heavenly Kings without many losses, our squirrel army finally reached the tenth floor. If my predictions were right then the last boss would be waiting here—Core 564.

We advanced our squirrels to scout ahead and found... a large, heavy door. It was unmistakably the door to the Boss Room. And, it was shut tightly.

“Oof...”

Welp. It was then that I realized the major flaw of swarm tactics. Indeed, a swarm of squirrels would have a hard time opening a door. It wouldn't be impossible, but it would be like playing tug of war while doing jumping jacks. Not only would doing jumping jacks completely kill your focus on the tug of war, it would take forever to finish.

"We should probably just wait for Aidy here," Rokuko observed.

"Yeah, agreed."

Aidy had already killed the second of the Four Heavenly Kings, Hiniere of Wrath. Though, uh, she had just stabbed him through the back while he was distracted by squirrels. It was honestly kind of funny how right after doing that she said she was excited to fight the boss of the floor when she got to the Boss Room. The third of the Heavenly Kings had given up on fighting, and the fourth was drowned in a sea of squirrels. In other words, there were no more obstacles, and all we had to do was wait a bit for Aidy to come walking down the stairs.

"Oh, you waited for me? Thank you kindly, Rokuko."

"No biggie, it looks like we're at the end anyway. I wanted to finish this together. You've worked the hardest out of all of us here, so I'll give you the right to open the door," Rokuko said, taking care not to say we just waited because opening it ourselves would have been tedious.

"Ahaha. What a lovely gift," Aidy said before opening the door to the Boss Room. Inside we saw that it was modeled after a throne room. There was a throne by the center of the back wall, and upon it sat a goat-headed demon with its legs crossed—Core 564, a Baphomet-type Dungeon Core.

"You have done well to come so far. I shall pra— GAAAH, WHAT?!"

We mercilessly attacked with our squirrels the second Core 564 tried to open his mouth. But he spread his wings and flew away. I could hear both Rokuko and Mikan click their tongues. They had been controlling the squirrels.

"Grr! You intend to stop me from even naming myself?! You have no taste for aesthetics! Grr, hold on, stop it!"

"Eat my Bouncy Bouncy Attaaaack!"

"Mikan, a little more to the right! Aw, you just missed him!"

The Boss Room on the tenth floor had such a high ceiling that the best the squirrels could do was grab onto Core 564's feet, only for him to kick them off. Having no other choice, we decided to listen to what he had to say.

"Rokuko, I have to say, that was quite ungraceful. Though I didn't dislike it."

“Well, Aidy, you know what they say: Nothing else matters except victory.”

“I can’t say I’ve ever heard that before, but I like it. Who said it?”

“Probably Keima.”

I don’t remember ever saying that line.

“Curses! You’re all fools! If I unleash my full power, you will all fall before me...!” shouted Core 564.

“My my, in that case, why didn’t you go all out from the beginning? You have courage, boring me like you have,” Aidy taunted.

“Silence! I will not be the one fighting you! Mistress, go forth!” Core 564 declared before retreating to a corner of the ceiling. A split second later, the throne that had been swarmed by squirrels exploded. And there appeared... a black-haired, red-eyed nun that I knew all too well.

“...Who has woken me from my slumber?” sad the nun while holding one half of her face down, her body crackling with purple lightning.



Leona Shishidou, the God of Chaos. She was a Hero, a Dungeon Master, and a Dungeon Core all at once—a ridiculous being of pandemonium known as the God of Chaos. She had previously infiltrated Goren as a Beddhist nun before kidnapping Niku, taunting us in a variety game show dungeon, then finally vanishing after leaving behind her Succubus companions.

And now, she was our enemy. Or, well, she had never been on our side before, but still.

“Keima... this might be a bit much.”

“Uh, yeah.” *This is real bad. We might lose this battle after all.*

We all felt the blood draining from our faces.

“...Friend, it was that goat-headed buffoon who awoke you, not I,” Aidy offered.

“What?! Sh-She told me to do that! I didn’t awake her from any slumber!” Core 564 stammered in a panic.

“...Hah. I just wanted to try saying that line. Wasn’t the lightning and stuff super cool?”

It didn’t matter why Leona was here. I took another look to make sure there wasn’t any mistake, but that was undoubtedly Leona. She looked the same as last time, after all. I had to wonder why she was still wearing her Beddhist nun outfit. Was she trying to do some double layered gag by slumbering as a Beddhist? If so, nobody noticed or thought it was funny.

“Hm? Why’re you all freezing up?” Mikan asked with a curious tilt of his head. *Well, ‘cause we’re friggin’ screwed*, I thought just as the squirrels charged at Leona.

“Master, Rokuko. Please stay strong. We have no choice but to defeat her,” Niku said, controlling the squirrels.

“R-Right.”

“That’s true,” Rokuko replied while resuming control of her own squirrels. Meanwhile, I leaned forward to keep a close eye on the battle... Oh, right, I’ll summon some Gargoyles to help out.

Aidy’s Perspective

“Woof, look at those murderous little eyes. What a bunch of cute squirrels,” Leona said before lifting up her nun skirt and performing a long-distance backstep that seemed to defy gravity. For some reason, despite the backstep appearing so slow, the squirrels couldn’t catch up to her.

Leona pointed a finger gun at the squirrels and said “Bang!”, causing a giant basketball-sized fireball to shoot out and burn them to a crisp. It was a completely chantless {Fireball}.

“Bwahaha! Perfect, mistress! Murder them aaaall!” Core 564 cackled from the ceiling. He seemed to really hate the squirrels for some reason. Aidy, on the other hand, was carefully observing them being killed.

“...Aidy, feel free to run away. That monster’s called Leona, and you don’t stand a chance against her,” Rokuko said.

“My my, Rokuko, how kind of you to say that. But it would be a waste to turn tail and flee when I could be inviting this splendid opponent to a dance.”

“Well, it’s your call. Keima just sent some Gargoyles to back you up if you need them.”

“Oh, why thank you. But I think it’s about time for me to begin,” Aidy said before taking a step forward. About half of the squirrels had been killed.

“Ahaha, hello there, Core 666. You go by Aidy now, right? I’m delighted to fight a cutie like you.”

“And you said your name is Leona, if I recall. Shall we dance?” Aidy said with a smile while slicing the air with the avatar of her true body, the flame Magic Blade.

“Oh, don’t expect me to play dumb and wonder whether I named myself. I know full well that Keima and his party are involved in this Dungeon Battle,” Leona said with a giggle while looking at the squirrels. No doubt she was smiling at Keima behind the camera. It was an obvious opening, and Aidy thrust her Magic Blade. But Leona grabbed the flaming blade of the sword with her bare hand.

“Is it not rude to look away from your dance partner?”

“Oh, my apologies. You’re just so weak I couldn’t help but look down on you a little. How about I look up at you instead, with my head buried in your crotch? I’m pretty confident in my tongue technique,” Leona said while stroking the blade, unfazed by the flames. The tingling situation went through the representation of her body all the way to her true self.

“Ngh... Could I ask you to stop that?” Aidy made the blade vanish to escape from Leona’s grasp. Then, she took a reflexive step back, feeling a dangerous aura radiating off her.

“Bwahaha! Don’t forget I’m here, Core 666!”

Right behind her was Core 564, who had descended from the ceiling to get a closer look.

“You’re in the way. At least serve as some footing for me.”

“Nghuh?! ”

Aidy jumped onto Core 564’s face, then kicked off it to leap at Leona.

“Aha, want me to caress you again? Sure, just come right over... Oh?”

Aidy swung her blade down. Leona moved to grab the blade again, but it passed right through her hands. Or to be more specific, Aidy had hid it right before it was caught, then rematerialized it on the other end of her hands. It was simple, really. But it took immense skill to perform such a split-second maneuver in an actual battle. It was known as the Phantom Ghost technique of Demon King style.

“Close, but no cigar.”

“What?!”

And yet, Leona still managed to catch the blade from behind. In the brief span of time between the blade reappearing and the blade hitting her body, she had managed to pull back her hands faster than Aidy’s blade was moving, and grab it hard enough to instantly kill its momentum.

“Ahaha. Is the best you can do?”

“Ngh!” Aidy once again made her body vanish and took her distance. This time, she wasn’t planning a counter attack. She just needed the space. And Leona watched her fleeing with a kind smile.

“Oh! I know. Let’s do something fun,” Leona said with a clap of her hands. “I’m going to use an ultra magic spell I developed myself. If you can stop it from activating, Aidy, it’s your win. And if you can’t, well... I will be having *lots* of fun. Ahaha. How does that sound?”

“Oh my. You will let me win merely by stopping the spell?”

“You bet. It’ll take about five minutes for everything to come together, so give it your best shot,” Leona said while maintaining her grin. It was the complete opposite of Aidy’s forced, wavering smile. It was a smile of composure, of mockery, of condescension—the smile of one who was completely dominant. And Aidy knew that Leona wasn’t wrong in the least to consider herself superior.

“Rokuko. What do you think?” Aidy asked.

“...Leona usually keeps her word on these things. You might have a chance of victory if you just need to stop the spell. But I’m a little thrown off by her calling it an ‘ultra spell.’”

“Leona. What do you mean when you call the spell an ‘ultra spell’? What does it do?”

“Ahaha. I wouldn’t want to spoil the surprise for you, would I? Though, I will at least say it’s not a spell for killing. Now then...” Leona clapped her hands, and a force field appeared to surround Core 564.

“M-Mistress? What is this?”

“You’re getting in our way. Stay there.”

“What?! I can fight here!”

“I’ll repeat myself only once. You’re in our way. Stay there. Understand? Or do you want to be turned into potions?” Leona asked with a smile. Core 564 paled and bobbed his head in a nod before

sitting obediently.

“...You certainly have him by the balls.”

“Ahaha. This is for my sake. I find that bossy men just kill the mood, you know?”

“If you say so,” Aidy replied while readying her Magic Blade, facing Leona head on.

“Shall we begin, then? Everyone ready? Okay... Start!” Leona began preparing the magic circle. Threads of light weaved together in complex circular patterns. Several of them floated in the air around Leona all at once before gathering in front of her, overlapping, and turning into a ball of shifting shapes.

“Goodness, that looks like nonsense. Can it even... RUN?!”

“How rude. Do you know how hard I worked to invent this?”

Aidy leapt at Leona so fast it was like an explosion. Or well, actually, the ground by her feet did explode.

“HYAAAAAAH!”

“Oh no, your cute battle cry is going to intimidate me so much my magic circles disappear! Just kidding.”

Leona deflected Aidy’s charge while slowly dancing around the magic circles while locking them into place in midair. Aidy had charged at full speed, but Leona just casually kicked her in the stomach as part of her rhythmical dance, sending her flying.

“Ngh! What trickery are you pulling?! How can you hit me when moving that slow?!”

“I just am.”

“That’s not... an answer! Nghaah!”

Leona was like a living wall that Aidy slammed against before being sent flying. Her red eyes narrowed in amusement.

“Aidy,” Rokuko chimed in, “Leona has a bunch of Hero skills. She’s probably using one of them to do that.”

“Rokuko... I would have liked for you to tell me that a little sooner.”

“Sorry. Have this backup as an apology.”

Squirrels leapt at the magic sphere—but Leona slapped them away while continuing to chant the spell, killing them all. They exploded in a red mist like water balloons filled with blood each time she casually slapped them.

“Bwahaha! Perfect, mistress, just perfect!”

Core 564’s cocky gloating within the force field was pretty annoying. Aidy ignored him and charged at Leona again.

“Aaah, what a shame. To think I’d be forced to kill such cute squirrels.”

“If it bothers you that much, why not stop protecting the sphere?”

“I’m joking, of course. Do you think I’d let these stupid animals

get in the way of my fun?”

Strangely, not an ounce of blood was on Leona’s hands. Another skill was probably to thank for that. Either way, her hands were tied up blocking the squirrels.

Aidy took the opportunity to get another attack in. This time she went dual blade style, with an avatar of her true self in either hand. If she could produce one Magic Blade avatar, it stood to reason she could produce another. It was the Murderous Double technique of Demon King style. Squirrels, the left blade, and the right blade. Leona lacked one hand to deal with all of them.

“Down you go.”

But she did have two legs ready and waiting. Without faltering for a moment, Leona flipped the skirt of her nun outfit—complete with a suggestive, airy slit running down the middle of it—and kicked one of the blades out of Aidy’s hand.

“Ngh! Quite the dexterous one, I see!”

“Ahaha, dancing is my specialty. I have a blade dance skill, after all.”

It was then that Aidy realized that it was abnormal that Leona could deal with the swarm of squirrels with a single hand.

“It’s like she’s sucking them all into one place,” Rokuko murmured over the call. The only answer was that she was using some skill to focus all the attacks into one place.

“You’re... guiding them?”

“Yep, that’s right—or close enough, anyway. I’m using {Attraction} and {Repulsion} here. Very nice skills, although they are boosted by my {Ultra Strengthening} skill.”

{Ultra Strengthening}—a skill that boosted the power of skills, and a Hero skill of its own. That explained the absurd effect of the skills. But how should it be countered? Aidy clicked her tongue.

“Don’t worry, {Ultra Strengthening} is restricted in that it can’t strengthen other Hero skills.”

“That doesn’t make me feel better.”

Normal skills being boosted to absurd heights through {Ultra Strengthening} basically meant that all of her skills were Hero Skills. Aidy couldn’t help but force a grin. Nothing about Leona wasn’t absurd.

“Don’t worry! You can only strengthen as many skills a day as {Ultra Strengthening} has levels!”

“Oh, fascinating. And what level is your {Ultra Strengthening}?”

“Good question. I’d like to know too,” Leona said, playing dumb while swinging her hands. She hadn’t dropped a single bead of sweat. Was she a monster? Oh, right. Rokuko had just called her one.

“Now then, all I have to do is say the key word and the ultra spell

is done,” Leona announced out of nowhere. That was way too fast.

“It hasn’t even been three minutes yet.”

“Correct, but I finished up the sphere faster than I thought. That said, I think I’ll hold off on activating it for another two minutes. Aren’t I nice?” Leona said with a mocking tone. Aidy clicked her tongue.

“I suppose you won’t mind if I use one of my ultimate techniques, then.”

“Go ahead. I’ll wait.”

Leona’s thoroughly arrogant attitude convinced Aidy to use her technique without holding back at all. {Crimson Road}, Aidy’s ace in the hole, a skill that could only be used a single time per day. It was an ultimate technique where she thrust her blade at a single point and burned everything in her way to a crisp.

She planted her feet in the ground and readied her aim carefully. Leona maintained her smile while slapping away squirrels. There were barely any of them left, but they kept leaping to their deaths to distract Leona. Though it was unlikely that Leona would do anything even if they did stop.

“Aidy, be careful. She might reverse the attack.”

“...Oh, that wouldn’t be good at all... Though worry not, I won’t be dying here.”

Aidy maintained her form even as Rokuko gave her advice. She heightened her strength as far as it would go. She could activate the skill at any time, but building up one’s strength first would increase the power even further. The air around Aidy twisted from the waves of heat.

“You have one minute leeeft,” Leona called out casually.

“I would love to see that smug grin of yours twisted in agony,” Aidy said.

“Be the change you want to see in the world, sweetie,” Leona replied.

With that taunt dropped, Aidy finally unleashed her {Crimson Road}.

“Here I come! {Crimson Road}...!”

Leona was standing directly in between the magic sphere and Aidy. If she moved the sphere would be hit, and if she stayed in place she would be hit head-on.

The blistering beam of red light shot straight toward Leona, and... she slid to the side, making no effort at all to protect the magic sphere. The heat, mana, and raw energy of {Crimson Road} slammed into the sphere, tearing it apart and making the strings of light disappear.

Leona, having let the attack pass right through, put a hand on her

mouth and laughed. "Oh nooooo! You destroyed the sphere. Too bad for me!" she said, not sounding sad at all. Aidy clicked her tongue.

"I fell for your trap... That sphere really was nonsense, wasn't it?"

"Correct! And you sure fell for it. I love it when that happens!"

Indeed. Leona had never said that the shining sphere of magic circles was necessary to activate her ultra magic. It was just for show—it was a decoy. And Aidy had wasted her ultimate attack on it.

"Time's up. Ultra spell, activate... {Enchant Root: Ecchi}!" A true magic sphere bloomed out of Leona's body. It was an activated sphere that could no longer be stopped. And with it done, she added on another chant.

"...{Force Call: Dungeon Core Number 89, Haku Laverio}."

In an instant, Haku appeared in front of Leona, sitting on the air as if it were a sofa.

"What? Ah!" But her sofa hadn't been summoned with her, so she fell right on her butt. "Wh-What in the world...?"

"Hello there, lil' Haku!"

"Wha, L-Leona?! Ngh, so you're behind this!" Haku instantly leapt up, pulled a long white spear from {Storage}, and assumed a battle stance. She scanned the area while keeping Leona in view.

"Haku... What are you doing here?"

"Core 666? I would like to know that myself... What's going on here? Were you not resting before going to fight Core 564?"

They weren't on the same page at all. Haku and Aidy floundered to figure out what was going on, but Leona had the answer for them.

"Ah, that was just a fake video feed I was sending your way. Pretty convincing stuff, huh?"

"...What? Hold on, Leona. Fake video? What are you talking about? Don't tell me..."

"Don't tell you I infiltrated Father's system? Well, you guessed right! I did."

Haku froze with an expression of shock on her face. Dungeon functions and the like were part of a system that Father, the God of Darkness, had invented. Infiltrating it meant that Leona truly was on equal footing with a true god.

"He should be able to see us now since I've canceled the feed. Bonjour! Yaaay! Can you see us, Father? How does it feel to have your system infiltrated? I bet you're happier than you've ever been."

Aidy understood what Leona had done, but the full extent of its significance escaped her.

"What have you done, Leona?!" Haku spat out.

"Hold on just a sec. Let me call over one more person... {Force Call: Keima Masuda}."

An instant later, Keima was summoned from Core 629's Master

Room into the Boss Room.

Keima's Perspective

In the blink of an eye, I was suddenly right in front of Leona.

"...Uh? Wait, what?!"

"There you are, Keima. It's been so long!"

Leona was standing in place with a smile. Haku was shooting her a murderous glare. Aidy was frozen in place, having no idea what to do. Core 564 was sitting in the force field.

...I knew what was going on since I had been observing the situation through the monitor. I could understand that if Haku had been summoned, it made perfect sense that she'd be able to summon me too.

"...Why'd you summon me here?"

"Because it seemed like it'd be fun, really."

Yep. That sure is a Leona thing to do.

"Leona! Summoning me here was the biggest mistake of your soon to be over life! Prepare yourself!" Haku declared before thrusting her spear at Leona, but Leona backhanded the tip of the spear away while keeping her eyes locked on me. She didn't even bother to look. And while both the thrust and her backhand had been too fast for me to see, I could guess Leona had managed it thanks to her Hero skills.

"Also... I made Aidy use her ultimate technique and everything just for fun, you know? I needed to make up for that and give her some backup somehow," Leona said, her logic being a mystery to everyone but herself. Though I guess it... kind of made sense? She had teased Aidy, and was making up for it by... summoning help.

"That said, I only really summoned Haku to show the full extent of what I can do, so yeah. Hyah!"

"Ngh!"

Leona flicked her hand, and Haku's arms froze as if something invisible were restraining her in place.

"Haku's a bit too strong to be fair backup, so I'll seal her for a bit. {Force Seal: N}."

"Ngh, ah, nnn! I can't, my strength...!"

"Aha! It worked? It worked, right! Another successful experiment! I love you, sweet little Haku!"

What in the world was going on in front of me? Leona was happily stroking Haku's cheek.

"Even your angry face is super cute! And well, don't worry. The weakness will only last a single afternoon."

"Ngh!" Haku gave her a sharp glare. But clearly she couldn't move. She just stood in place as Leona did what she wanted.

“Glad to see you’re okay, Keima, but... Can you save my sister?” Rokuko asked over the call.

“Gotta say, I have no idea. Doesn’t seem like Leona’s gonna kill her or anything,” I replied. At least Rokuko was safe.

“...Rokuko’s Master? What is going on over there...?” Aidy asked.

“I’ve got no idea, but I think one wrong move here might put us all in real trouble.”

All I could do was stand next to Aidy and watch. Given that all the squirrels had frozen in place, I could guess that Rokuko and the others in the Master Room didn’t know what to do either.

“Oh, and have a bonus.”

“Huh?”

A black ball of mana appeared over Leona’s right hand. It was an ominous-looking orb with purple lightning crackling over it. One look was all it took to realize it was dangerous.

“Don’t worry, this is actually super safe. At any rate, Keima. Your side in the Dungeon Battle is led by Core 629, a rabbit-type Core, right?”

“Huh? Er, yeah. So what?” *And how’d she figure that out...? Oh, right, I guess it makes sense for her to know anything thanks to {Ultra Identification}. No point thinking about it.*

“And what do you think of when someone says rabbits?”

“...F-Fluffiness?”

“Correct! Rabbits can only mean bunny girls!”

She ignored my answer. *Don’t bother asking if you’re just gonna ignore me.*

“Which brings me to... {Force Replacement: Bunny Girl}!”

Leona tossed the mana ball at the ceiling... and then, my vision was shrouded in darkness.

“Ngh?! Wh-What the...”

“Another successful experiment! Ah, what a wonderful day this has been! I’m already completely satisfied, if I’m honest.”

My vision cleared gradually as I rubbed my eyes. And before me was...

A leotard with latticed leggings and an open bust that left the top of the boobs exposed to the air. Cuffs to gloves that didn’t really do anything, and a bow tie by the neck. A fluffy rabbit tail on the butt. And finally, a headband with rabbit ears on the head.

I just described a bunny girl outfit, and for some reason Haku, Aidy, and Leona were all wearing one now. *Why bunny girls? I mean, obviously Leona did this, but why?*

“Oh, darn. I forgot to take Core 564 out of the force field, and now he’s being left out. Sorry!”

“Th-That’s completely fine, mistress!”

I glanced and saw that Core 564 wasn't in a bunny outfit. *Wait... She only mentioned him being left out?*

"Keima... You're so cute! Ahhh, I think this is the first time I've ever been thankful to Leona before," Rokuko exclaimed.

"...Hold on a second there, Rokuko. Are you telling me I'm stuck in a bunny suit too?" I had been ignoring my bad feeling, but in the end I had to face the reality that I, too, was in a bunny suit. *What the hell? Who wants to see a dude in a bunny suit?*

A glance to the side revealed my clothes scattered on the floor nearby. I quickly put them in {Storage} so nobody would notice that they were golems made of orichalcum.

"It's easy to move in these, though I find it hard to believe they will provide much use in a fight. Off you go," she said, and then her clothes were instantly back to normal. She must have used her dungeon functions. *I wanna change too... Why am I being forced to wear a bunny suit in the bottom of a dungeon?*

Although the situation was ridiculous, we were still in incredible danger. Dungeon Cores and Masters had been forced out of the Master Room where they belonged, then had their weapons forcibly removed. It was the worst threat imaginable. No longer did it matter how strong your dungeon was, or how deep within you hid it. Leona had obtained the most powerful dungeon killer there could possibly be.

But still, bunny suits, really? Did it have to be bunny suits...?

"Ngh," came a grunt, and I looked just in time to see blood streaming out of Leona's nose.

"Wowee... I guess I did push myself a little too far there. Still needs some improving, I guess."

Leona wiped the blood away with a hand, then dug a handkerchief-looking thing from Haku's pile of clothes. She then changed it with {Ultra Alchemy}, turned it into a red stone, and swallowed it.

"L-Leona?! Of all things, of *all* things, that is just going too far! How humiliated will I have to be before you're satisfied?!"

"Ahaha. Now that was yummy. Not a bad stone. I guess I shouldn't expect any less from the panties of a goddess, hm?"

Haku's cheeks went bright red as she glared at Leona tearfully. *Uh, well. I know what that cloth was now, but I'm going to pretend I didn't hear anything.*

Leona went ahead and changed all of Haku's clothes into red stones one by one, which she stuck into {Storage}. And thus, Haku had no changes of clothes. That was probably Leona telling her to stay as a bunny girl for a bit. Yaaaah.

"Anyway, I've had my fun now, so that'll be all for today. Later," Leona said before heading to the Boss Room's door. "Ngh!"

Aidy took a step forward, as if to stop her. But stopping her wouldn't improve the situation at all—we still couldn't beat her. It was best to just let her leave, and Aidy probably understood that, because despite looking like she wanted to say something, she ultimately didn't.

“W-Wait a moment, mistress! What'll happen to me if you leave?!” shouted Core 564.

“Oh. Right, that was my cover story for coming here. I forgot completely,” Leona said, snapping her fingers to make the barrier around Core 564 disappear. “But I've already had my fun. I'm out of here. If that makes you mad, well, here. Have this.”

Leona instantly teleported in front of Core 564 and took something out of {Storage}. I was too far away to see what it was.

“Ah! I-Is this what I think it is?!”

“It's, ah... Right. Put it on your arm and you'll probably get way stronger? You wanted something like this, right?” Leona asked with a smile. Core 564, looking a bit pale, nodded vigorously.

“Rokuko, can you see what she gave him?” I asked.

“Mmm... Something dark. I can't really tell what it is.”

Core 564 took the dark thing from Leona and pressed it against his left arm.

“Well, that's that. Peace out.”

After trashing up the Dungeon Battle like a tornado, Leona left with a smile and a wave... leaving behind me, Aidy, Core 564, and Haku. Plus the surviving squirrels.

The first to move were the squirrels. Most of them were dead, but the survivors leapt at Core 564's face.

“Ngah! Hyaaah!” Core 564 roared, swinging his arm around to knock them off.

“Keima, Aidy, what're you doing?! Now's your chance!” Rokuko yelled.

“R-Right...”

“Oh, yes.”

At Rokuko's urging, Aidy (looking much less enthusiastic than before) and I began to act. But since I would almost certainly die if I got involved in a fight, I focused on getting myself and Haku to a closer place.

“...Th-This is humiliating...! I will never forgive you, Leona!”

“M-My sympathies.”

I lent a shoulder to Haku as we evacuated to the corner of the Boss Room. While I was there I took out a towel from {Storage} and handed it to her. *Too bad about her clothes. I'm glad I managed to save mine.*

“She just... toyed with me...”

“What was all that about, anyway?” I asked while changing and watching Aidy and Core 564 fight in the corner of my eye.

“It might have been a declaration of war. Toward Father, that is.”

“Hm...” *That reminds me, Leona had been talking about killing gods or whatever.*

I glanced back at the fight and saw that the Gargoyles I had summoned early ahead of time were now participating. Core 564 swung his now-black left arm to knock them down, shattering their bodies. *Uh, that arm of his sure did just stretch out pretty far.*

“Heeey, Rokuko, do you think you guys can beat that?”

“Keima, you’ve changed clothes. Help us fight here. If you’re not going to fight, change back.”

“Alright, alright, I’ll help. Sorry, Haku. I’ve gotta go.”

I left the extremely displeased-looking Haku on her own. Didn’t want to get wrapped up in the crossfire of her bad mood.

Once I was far enough away, I transformed into myself using {Ultra Transformation}, then started busting out {Summon Gargoyle}. *Speaking of which, at some point I started being able to use Mid-Rank spells even when {Ultra Transformed}. I wonder why that is. When did the change happen? I have no idea, but I might as well make full use of it.*

“Gaaa! Still, more! Whyyy!” Core 564 roared while the Gargoyle corpses piled up around him. Aidy threw some swings of her own into the mix, but his freely shifting left arm made it hard to do any real damage.

“This isn’t Demon King style or anything graceful at all. What a pathetic way to fight.”

“Shut up! Silence! I just... need... to WIIIN!”

Core 564 swung his increasingly massive left arm around like a hammer. It was like six logs of wood strapped together, and although Aidy could dodge it, each swing sent several Gargoyles flying to explode against a wall.

I replaced the rapidly dying Gargoyles. *And is it just me, or are Core 564’s eyes going crazy? Seems kind of like the darkness from his left eye is invading his whole body, judging by the veins bulging ominously all over him.*

“GWAYRRRAHAHRAGHH!”

Yeah, that was pretty much the shining example of a horrific animal-like roar. Him having a goat head didn’t exactly help with that. *Anywaaay, no way he isn’t going to lose control of himself and go on a bloody rampage. Or maybe he’s already lost control of himself? What the hell did Leona give him?*

“Aidy! Can you cut off his left arm?!”

“I’ve been trying, but it isn’t easy. If I at least had an opening to use a skill... tch!”

Aidy clicked her tongue and did a backstep just before Core 564's dark arm slammed down, turning her previous location into a crater. It kind of felt like he had turned into a giant consisting of a single massive arm.

"...Welp, guess I can't keep playing it safe. Aidy, I'm coming in with backup! {Element Burst}!"

I decided to use my trump card, {Element Burst}. Wataru had probably already reported this spell to Haku, so there was no point in hiding it any longer.

The light of my rampaging mana slammed in Core 564's left arm. It was pretty easy to hit since it was so large. But despite opening up a huge hole, pitch-black tentacles slithered out wetly to fill it back in. *Now that's gross, and some pretty crazy healing power.*

Perhaps due to the outside stimulation, Core 564's left arm swelled even further in size. It changed shape, too, turning into a big, round squid-like thing. Core 564 was riding on top of it like a hat.

"The heck is that? What are we supposed to do about this thing?"

It was such a massive ball of black meat that it felt like there wasn't any open space left in the entire sizable Boss Room. Then, an eye opened on it. That was probably where he had first pushed the thing Leona gave him. And now there were spikes growing on the tentacles growing from the fingers. It looked familiar.

Right... This looks like a Dungeon Eater. Maybe it's the same kind of thing?

"...At this point it's less an arm, and more just a living thing."

"I agree," Aidy said, having at some point moved to stand beside me. And instantly, several thin black tentacles shot out from the squid-body and charged toward us. They were thinner than an arm, but were about as thick as four finger— *Wait, whoa! GAAAH!*

"Oh my. That was some spry movement, Rokuko's Master. I didn't know you were such a trained fighter."

"Ngh, holy shit, that was too close! Don't wrap me up in this! Fight somewhere else!"

"Unfortunately, it seems to be targeting you, not me."

I didn't even have the time to say "What?" More tentacles came descending upon me. *This is messed up. I would already be dead if not for my golem assistance. Just look, there's huge holes in the floor where the tentacles hit. Did it get that pissed off from me shooting a hole in it?*

"Keima! Haku needs help!" came Rokuko's voice, and I hurriedly looked for Haku. *Where? She's not where she was. There. There she is. She's caught by tentacles.*

"Ngh, ngggh!"

Haku, still weakened by whatever Leona did to her, couldn't offer any meaningful resistance. The towel I had lent her was ripped off,

exposing her thicc bunny girl body to the world, and the tentacles were wrapping around that body, keeping her stuck in place.



Ohhh shit. What am I supposed to do here?

“Aaah, excuse me, test test. Do you have a second, Keima?”

That was when it happened. I heard Father’s voice. He had been watching after all.

“Eek?! I-Is that you, papa?” Core 629 said.

“Oh, you didn’t realize I was here, Core 629? But Keima, you figured it out, didn’t you?”

“Er, well, yeah, but I’m kinda busy heeere?!”

“Father! Haku’s in trouble!”

“Erm, Rokuko. I went ahead and cast protection magic on Haku. Relax.”

I glanced at Haku while dodging tentacles and saw that while she was captured by the tentacles, all they could do was hold in her place. They couldn’t attack her. That said, even with that in mind, I was too busy dodging tentacles myself to have a decent conversation.

“So, what? You’re going to help us?” I asked.

“Uh-huh. At this point I really do have to get involved. I can’t let my kids go around doing things like this.”

“Really?! Great! Snap your fingers and make it all go away!” *Hell yeah! Feels good to have a god on my side.*

“...However, there are limits on how much I can get involved. The protection I put on Haku won’t last for long. Somehow it’s eating away at my power,” Father said, feeling as if he were shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head up there. “So, could you cut that arm off Core 564 while Haku is still safe? If you can do that, I’ll take care of the arm.”

In other words, he couldn’t help us that easily. A quick look confirmed that Core 564 was less being swung around by his left arm and more just a strap attached to the monster that used to be an arm. And Father wanted us to separate them.

“It’ll actually be pretty bad if things stay like this. Could you work together with Core 666 to cut it off as soon as possible? For me?”

Honestly, Aidy and I were so occupied with just dodging the tentacles that asking us to go on the offensive seemed kind of irresponsible.

“Rokuko’s Master! Can you do it?!” Aidy yelled.

Apparently Aidy had been told the same thing.

“Keima, save Haku! Please!” Rokuko cried.

“...Alright, alright. I’ll do it! Let’s give it a shot!” *More like, I don’t have any choice but to try it.*

Gah. To think I’d be stuck fighting on the front lines. Dungeon Masters are supposed to hide deep in dungeons and avoid this kinda thing. This is all Leona’s fault. Curse you, Leona.

“Aidy, do you have any way to cut it off?!”

“That magic spell of yours is better than anything I can do right now!”

Time to give it a shot. I focused my mana to cast the spell.

“{Element Bur—}... Whoa!”

But before I could finish, the tentacles thrust Haku in front of us. *I can't attack like this!* I canceled the chant mid-way through. The monster seemed cautious about the spell.

“Ngh... How humiliating! And I'm still wearing this cursed outfit of all things!” Haku groaned with her cheeks red in shame, frustrated about more than a few things.

“I can't attack like this, whoops!”

“...A meat shield, hm? That is so very much like Core 564! Hah!”

Apparently it wouldn't make long distance attacks easy for us. Aidy swiped away at the tentacles approaching me with her flaming Magic Blade.

“Aidy, could you cut Core 564 right off it?”

“I do have some skills, though they aren't on the level of {Crimson Road}. It's just that the tentacles are in my way.”

Apparently we were stuck if we couldn't stop the tentacles.

Actually, no. Let's phrase that as: If we can just stop the tentacles, we win. So what can we do to stop them?

“Rokuko. Got any ideas on how to stop the tentacles?”

“A flood of Gargoyles definitely won't work. We just saw that for ourselves, and not being able to use our usual swarm strategy makes this a lot harder.”

That was true. My basic strategy for a lot of fights was overwhelming the enemy with numbers. Be it rats, plankton, squirrels, or Gargoyles, it was what I defaulted to. But this time, that wouldn't cut it.

“Maybe you could grow super big like Dinne and stop it? Can {Ultra Transformation} do that?”

“That's a good line of thinking.” But Dinne needed a ton of water from an outside source to grow that big, and she used a skill to do it anyway. Who knew if {Ultra Transformation} could replicate it?

I took a look at Core 564. *Yeah, I probably shouldn't transform into that thing. I'd probably get cursed or something. Let's not have a repeat of the time I {Ultra Transformed} into Leona, then got killed by a curse.*

“Keima! Fight tentacles with tentacles! One of my friends is a tentacle monster!” Core 629 declared.

“Mikan, what are you even... Wait, no. That might actually be a good idea!”

I needed a monster that was naturally huge, that I had seen before, and that had tentacles. And luckily, I had once fought a hard

battle against one such monster. *Yep. This is it. I've gotta do it now.*

"Aidy, I'll stop the tentacles. Take him out when he's open."

"You have a plan? Very well. I'll be ready."

I canceled my self-transformation, then mentally envisioned the monster I wanted. "{Ultra Transformation}, Gigaplant!"

The next instant, everything around me grew small. Or rather, I grew massive. The clothes I had been wearing ripped and tore to pieces as I grew. One could say a big problem with {Ultra Transformation} was that your clothes didn't transform with you.

In front of me was Core 564's left arm. Size-wise, I was a bit taller than it. We were both big enough to fill half of the room, and I took control of my half by pushing over Core 564's arm as I grew. One should say that it was as impressive as one would expect the boss monster owned by Core 219, a member of the 200 batch, to be.

In any case, with Aidy at my back, I tried moving my arms... or the Gigaplant's vines, rather. *Whoa, holy cow. This is actually pretty hard!*

I could move only a few of them consciously, and all the other vines moved as if they had minds of their own. But on closer examination, I saw that the vines attacked by the black tentacles were instinctively fighting back by wrapping around them and holding them in place.

Like a venus flytrap biting down on any bug that landed on it, my Gigaplant vines were wrapping around and squeezing anything that touched it. That was unexpected, but made things a lot of easier. Who knew it had an automatic defense system! I had been wrapped up by Gigaplant vines myself. Maybe the same process had been involved there.

"Ah, stop! What are you doing?! Eek, ah, hyaaaah!"

"Um, Keima?! What the heck are you doing to Haku?!"

Hey, my Gigaplant vines wrapped around Haku on their own when the monster tried using her as a shield. It's not my fault. Really, I'm holding down a ton of the tentacles thanks to this. It's for the best.

"I won't forget this...!" Haku said, trembling and glaring at me with tearful eyes alongside her red cheeks.

Okay, that's actually terrifying. Thinking about what's going to come next after all this is actually the scariest thing in my life. I stealthily moved a vine to block Haku from view.

Meanwhile, Aidy jumped from vine to vine until she climbed up to my head. Our size difference was such that it felt like she was a figurine on top of me.

"Not a bad view," she said. I couldn't talk in this form, so I just gave a slight nod.

I focused on a few vines to wrap them around Core 564's left arm,

that way Aidy could run along them and head straight to Core 564's actual body. *Now, Aidy! Go forth! Cut Core 564's left arm right off him!*

"....."

"Um, Aidy? What are you doing?" Rokuko asked.

"Oh, nothing, I just wanted to enjoy my fill of Haku being shamed a bit longer. It's not every day that the Ivory Goddess herself would end up so cute and helpless, no?"

"Whatever! Just go! Do what you need to do," Rokuko yelled, and with a bemused shrug Aidy began walking to Core 564 while slicing away at the tentacles. I used my vines to help.

At this point Core 564 was frothing at the mouth with the darkness having encroached all the way up his shoulder. Aidy stood in front of him.

"Graah... GRAAAH! Grraagggh!"

"Now then. Hello there, Core 564. I've come all this way to see you... And goodness, do you look like a pathetic clown right now."

There was no sanity left in his eyes. Aidy readied her sword and gathered her strength to cleave down his left shoulder. Black tentacles charged at her in the process, but I wrapped vines around each to stall them.

"I do hope you'll show the proper gratitude for my mercy, weakling. {Crimson Slash}!"

And so, with a flash of Aidy's Magic Blade, Core 564 was separated from his left arm. It slid down a bit, then blood sprayed from both stumps.

Whether it knew about our promise to Father or not, black tentacles stretched out from the mass to reconnect with Core 564. But before they could, I pulled them all apart with vines.

"Okay. Leave the rest to me. {Purification}," Father said, and shining light rained down upon the severed left arm.

"...GYURAAAHHHHAAH!" screamed a toothy mouth that had appeared on the tentacles growing off the left arm. Then, the giant mass shrunk, until it eventually returned to the size of a goat-headed demon's arm. There wasn't a speck of blackness on the arm. At most, there was a dark-colored baby beetle that was hard to even see resting on top of it.

"Core 666, could you burn that for me? That bug's responsible for all this," Father said.

"...As you wish, Father."

Aidy hopped down my Gigaplant body, then stabbed her fire Magic Blade into the baby bug. It immediately burst into a pillar of fire, vanishing completely. A pitiful, unremarkable end to the cause of the giant monster battle that concluded the Dungeon Battle.

Epilogue — Emmymephy's Perspective

"These feelings are maaagiiiic!"

"MAAAAGIIC!"

Attack spells and arrows launched in sync with the lyrics of Ichigo's song, "A Loving Rabbit's Always Straightforward." The combination attack sent the army of Skeletons flying in an explosion of bones.

"I take a single step CLOSEEER!!!"

"CLOSEEER!"

There the phalanx advanced forward, pumping their spears to slaughter the group of Gargoyles. Emmymephy watched all this going on from behind.

"I say, we went from a long period of random silence, to suddenly facing one hundred monsters attacking all at once. Surprising, but they still didn't stand a chance before our wotagei. Truly, wotagei is fearsome."

"Ahaha. Impressive, right? This is how strong we are working together. Though yeah, this is the first time it's ever lasted this long."

Incidentally, the raid event had lasted so long it had become nighttime. But while the plains area was supposed to darken with the outside, it was still retaining the bright light of noon.

Once the enemies were exterminated, the danger period ended and the Safe Zone returned.

"Thank you, everyooone!"

"ICHIGOOOO!"

Ichigo's voice echoed throughout the plains, magnified by a magic tool. The frontline warriors exchanged their spears for glow sticks and their shields for fans, which they held high in the air.

"Whew. The last wave was pretty big, but we pulled through just like always."

"Gargoyles don't pose much of a threat to us at all nowadays. First time we've seen Succubi, though."

The army reflected on the lengthy battle and chatted about it excitedly. Meanwhile, the rabbits were flocking over the frontliners who had fought the hardest, giving them the fluffiest time of their lives. Somehow it seemed like there were more rabbits than normal, but well, no point sweating the small stuff. Several adventurers

watched that on with envy while stroking the individual rabbits who were rubbing their legs like a consolation prize.

Then, not long after the Safe Zone returned, night fell across the plains, as if the light had remained only to make it easier for them to fight. Some people shouted in surprise, but everyone calmed down once they remembered that they had been fighting long enough for it to be night, and it was supposed to be that dark anyway.

“I say, that surprised me. To think it’s already nighttime.”

“Yeah...”

It was about as bright as a night with a full moon, so bright that they didn’t need any torches. That too was standard.

Anyway, while Emmymephy and Rinnew were taking a breather, Ichigo the Idol stopped singing and cheering from the stage to walk on over.

“Th-Thank you for your help, Rinnew.”

“Heya, Ichigo. Thanks for the support back there.”

“Y-You’re Ichigo?! The real thing?! The one and only Ichigo?!”

“What, Mephy, didn’t you see her dancing on the stage and directing us a second ago?”

“I-I did see her! Ah, ah, aaaah! Please shake my hand!”

Emmymephy said, thrusting out a hand, and Ichigo shook it with both of hers.

“Oh gods above... I’m shaking hands with Ichigo! My heart can barely take it...! Her hands are so soft and smooth! I-I’m looking forward to your new song! I believe in you!”

“Whoa there, Mephy. Aren’t you supposed to be acting like the imperial princess right now? And don’t rub your hands all over hers like that. If you’re gonna go that far, bring a handshake ticket.”

“I-It’s fine. Eheheh, I’m glad to finally meet you, princess!” Ichigo said with a dazzlingly bright smile. Emmymephy thought she was going to melt.

“And y’know, you still start stammering all over the place once you step off the stage, huh?”

“A-Aw. I can’t help it, rabbits are cowardly by nature...! Oh, right. The rabbits brought these to me! They’re for everyone who helped. Could you distribute them, Rinnew?”

“Huh? Whoa, that’s a lotta stuff,” Rinnew said while taking a basket packed with potions from Ichigo. That was probably the reward for today’s raid event. There were so many potions that they had just given them all to Ichigo.

“Also, it seems like there’s a special reward for you, princess. They were saying something about the king coming to see you.”

“Wait, what? A special reward, for me? The king is coming?” Emmymephy asked, tilting her head in confusion since she had done

nothing but watch from afar. That was probably something the ones who actually fought deserved. And who in the world was the “king”?

“It seems he wants to thank you for bringing so many strong soldiers.”

“So the king knows what’s going on with us personally, huh...? Oh, Mephy. This is my first time hearing about this ‘king’ too. I won’t be able to tell you who he is.”

“Hrm, well, as a member of the imperial family, it is part of my duties to greet the local king.”

It was then that a hole opened in the night sky—or the ceiling of the environment room, rather—and a basket was lowered down from a string. Inside was an orange-colored rabbit with a small crown on its head.

“Hello! I’m the king of these rabbits!” he declared, and at once all the rabbits bowed before him.

“The rabbit spoke...!”

“Whoa! It’s a real talking rabbit! And his fur is orange!”

Some adventurers copied the rabbits and bowed, some got to their knees, some stood in a daze, and some looked at the talking rabbit with sparkling eyes. As for Emmymephy, she read the room and got to her knees. That was the proper form with which an imperial princess should greet royalty. On the inside, she was mainly thinking that the king rabbit would be pretty huge, instead of just normal-sized.

The king rabbit lowered himself right in front of Emmymephy, still riding in the basket. “You may stand. Ummm... Thanks for your help this time! Those are nasty, evil demons that want to eat us. They came at us really hard this time, so I think we’ll be safe for a bit!”

“Erm, I’m glad to have been of service?”

“Uh-huh! Princess, you brought lots of servants to help! That’s why I’m giving you this rabbit ear headband as a gift!” the Rabbit King said before dexterously grabbing the rabbit ear headband with his front paws and offering it up to Emmymephy, who reverently accepted it... and then put it on her head, because why not. Rabbit ear headbands are incredibly cute, and seeing it on her head sent cheers of approval from the adventurers.

“Too good! An imperial princess and rabbit ears! This is the event of the age!”

“Amazing! Rabbit ears are the best!”

“Is this the birth of an epic new idol?! Th-This might mark a new era of history!”

Clapping echoed across the plains. Only the adventurers could clap, but the rabbits were stomping their front feet happily too.

“By the way, that headband is a magic tool, and the ears move when you put mana into it! I invented it just for you, as a gift! We

don't need them since we have our own ears, but I think a magic tool... might be worth a lot of money in human society, right?" the king asked Emmymephy nervously. A magic tool that did nothing but move wouldn't be worth that much money, but Emmymephy was not so dense as to say that out loud. Not to mention that the crowd here might just pay a lot of money for it.

"Thank you very much! I will treasure it."

"Uh-huh!"

Emmymephy gave a bright smile. The rabbit king probably did too.

"Also, Ichigo. Could you lend me your ear for a sec?" the king said.

"Oh, um, right. Uh-huh... uh-huh... Ah, okay. I understand. Thank you!"

"Okay, everyone, thanks for the help! May our union be long and fruitful!"

After telling something to Ichigo, the rabbit king returned to the ceiling in his basket, and as soon as he was inside the hole it closed. Was someone pulling the string to pull him back up? The thought of that made the whole thing seem a bit surreal.

"Ichigo, what did the king say?"

"Oh, um. He said he's looking forward to me playing my new song! Oh, and by the way, the king's personal musician made this song."

"Oooh! Wait, he has a musician?"

"Um? I think him having one is the whole reason music comes out of the stage."

Now that she mentioned it, people had been curious about who was playing the music that came from the stage. Though they didn't think about it because their minds had adjusted to not thinking about things that conflicted with their common sense.

Later, Emmymephy safely got the opportunity to listen to Ichigo perform her new song live from the front row. She got to participate in a wotagei phalanx, which was very satisfying. Going out of her way to learn it had paid off. The new song, titled "A Sleepy Rabbit's Rampage," was energetic and Emmymephy's favorite song yet.

Soon enough, the live show was over.

"Everyone! I say, let's think of a new wotagei formation to match this song! I want to reuse a battle formation from the imperial guard to make something cool, but does anyone else have any ideas?"

"Princess! What about an arrow formation? We could get in the shape of a pointed arrowhead!"

"No, I say we use the wing formation! It's good for surrounding things!"

“Wait, wait! What if we all hone our own skills and stuff? We could be like a small squadron of elite fighters! We adventurers have made tons of formations like that!”

And so, with Emmymephy in charge, they spent all night discussing the creation of a new wotagei formation.

Keima's Perspective

With a single snap from Father, Haku and I were returned to where we had been before Leona summoned us. He even went out of his way to put our normal clothes back on, so we weren't naked or in a bunny girl suit. Truly service befitting of a god. (And I had already picked up the shattered remains of my Wearable Golem with vines). Once I sat back down in my seat, it was time for the Dungeon Battle to resume... though Core 564 was still unconscious.

“So, all I have to do is finish him off now and we win,” Aidy said.

“Don't do it, Aidy. Let's keep Core 564 alive for now.”

“Oh my. I truly do have a kind archenemy, don't I? Personally, I think killing him now will save us much potential trouble in the future,” Aidy replied, furrowing her brows. She probably thought that Rokuko was shying away from the idea of killing a Core.

Rokuko, however, just gave a laugh. “I mean, we can kill him whenever we want, right? Don't you want to wait a bit and see him squirm with the pathetic frustration of a worm who lost in every single way?”

His Succubi and Gargoyles had been destroyed by adventurers, and Aidy had burned his mansion to the ground. Then his Dungeon was conquered by a swarm of mere squirrels that not only defeated his Four Heavenly Kings, but led to one of them betraying him. And on top of everything, he was forced to dance on the palm of the one he called for help, Leona, and nearly died... or rather, he was dead for certain until his enemies, of all people, saved his life. He was a Core of the 500 batch, and despite facing off against Cores from the 600 batch, he completely lost what should have been an easy victory!

Aidy instantly grinned at Rokuko's suggestion. “Yes! Splendid! Oh, that is just perfect. I could not imagine anything more fun than this. You are a genius, Rokuko.”

“Eheh. It's all thanks to my Dungeon Master's teachings.”

I don't remember ever teaching you anything like that... Sheesh, I sure have a partner with a bad personality, huh?

And so, after tossing Core 564 out of the Boss Room, the lock on the other door opened. The Core Room was right behind it. Inside was a bedroom, and we found the Dungeon Core in one of the corners. We thought a Succubus or two might be hiding there, but there was

nobody else in the room. Though even if there had been someone, Aidy would have cut them down. The Boss Room Core 564 had been waiting in was apparently the final challenge of the dungeon.

"I think he would make an even more amusing expression if Core 629, Mikan, was the one to touch the Core. Don't you think that would be just the most delicious irony to end the dungeon battle on?"

"Oh, okay! If you don't mind, I'll go ahead and do that."

Just how far are they gonna take this?

At Aidy's suggestion, Mikan controlled the squirrels to touch the Dungeon Core.

"Congratulations, Core 629. You win," Father said. We were all exhausted from what had happened, but in the end we secured victory.

"Yay! Thank you, papa!" Mikan jumped in the air and pumped his fist with his fluffy body. I didn't really understand why we had to bother touching the Core when Core 564 was unconscious right over there, but it was probably important for some formal reason or something.

Anyway, Mikan hopped to turn and look at me. "By the way, you noticed papa was watching, right? How'd you know?"

"Oh, because Haku wasn't here with us."

This Dungeon Battle had been started at the Core gathering. It would make complete sense if Father were involved, just like he had been at last year's triple threat battle. But what sealed the deal was the audience room. Who would prepare a whole room just to watch a Dungeon Battle? If Haku's faction and the Demon King Faction were in opposition to each other, it was logical for Haku to be with us and Core 6 to be with Core 564, just like they had been with their team in the triple threat battle. Honestly, something felt off the second two enemies like them were watching from the same room. It was obvious someone above either of them was involved.

"Oooh, so that's why you said what you did when Haku called you."

"Yep. Though that was about half a guess to see how she would react."

"Awww... I didn't notice at all!"

"I noticed!" Rokuko exclaimed.

"Oh, I noticed as well," Aidy added.

Really now? I thought, looking at both of them dubiously. But they were both brimming with so much smug confidence I had no way of telling if they were lying or not.

"A lot happened, but good work! Oh, should I return Core 666 to Core 629's Master Room?"

"Yes, please do... Thank you, Father," Aidy said, having been

teleported to the Master Room before she could finish her response.

“Welcome back, Aidy. Good work out there.”

“Same to you, Rokuko.”

Aidy and Rokuko high-fived each other, a loud slap signifying the strength of their friendship.

“I wanna join too!”

“Okay, okay. Here you go,” Rokuko said, giving Mikan a fluffy high five. The fur dampened the sound, but it was worth it. Aidy gave him one too.

“Wow, you three sure have gotten close, huh?” Father said.

“Father, Rokuko and I are archenemies—it is only natural that we would be close. Though I don’t mind if Mikan and I become enemies of sorts as well.”

“Eek! I don’t wanna fight you, Aidy... Oh, but since I’m in Haku’s faction now, I guess we’re enemies...? I-I wanna be friends!”

“Hahaha! Well then. Anyway, to reward you for winning, I will officially recognize your names as Mikan and Aidy to the full extent of my authority.”

Aidy and Mikan both twitched with surprise when he said he would officially recognize their names.

“Thank you very much, Father. I’m positively overjoyed to have an officially recognized name just like Rokuko.”

“Yay! I did it! It’s always been my dream for papa to recognize my name!”

Yeah, I still don’t really get why this is such a good gift for Cores. At least they’re happy, I guess.

“Ahaha. Well, that’s just a secondary prize. I had a lot of fun with this Dungeon Battle, and I want to sweetly reward the winners of it. Core 564’s still unconscious, so let’s go ahead and start with the gifts.”

Oh, we’re getting gifts? Alright.

“In that case, I’ll ask for one of the pieces of divine bedding that I don’t have.”

“Impressive, Keima. Not many people would tell me what to do like that.”

“K-K-Keima?! What are you saying to Father?! That’s super disrespectful!”

Rokuko was panicking, but I didn’t really think it was anything worth sweating over. *He’s your old man, right? Phrasing it like that, the franker I speak with him the better, I think.*

“Mmmm, well you already have a divine futon blanket, so that’s out. I’ll throw in an extra one as Rokuko’s gift, that makes sense. You know where a pillow and mattress are, but you don’t have them. Maybe they would still be good, then...”

Whoa, we’re getting two? Now that’s a treat I didn’t expect. Though

how does Father know I've found where the pillow and mattress are? Is he looking inside my head? Or do I unlock some kind of achievement or title just from figuring out where they are? I hope it's that.

"Pillow, mattress, nightcap, quilt, pajamas, alarm clock... Oh, the alarm clock was removed from the group. Guess that leaves the underwear for last. So, which do you want? Go ahead and tell me."

"...Hm, not an easy choice." *Oh man, picking this myself is actually super rough. In a way I want the pillow and mattress the most. After all, with a pillow, mattress, and futon blanket, you've basically got a whole set right there. But I already know that Maiodore and Haku have those. In other words, as Father said, I know where I can get them myself. Which means I should probably get the nightcap or the underwear first.*

"Wh-What do you recommend?"

"Let's see... The quilt, and the alarm clock, I think."

I asked to see what happened and he gave me a casual answer. *The quilt's one thing, but didn't he say the alarm clock was removed from the group?*

"...I was pretty proud of the alarm clock, really. It made waking up in the morning feel totally refreshing... Haaah. I never thought it would be beaten to pieces."

"Oh, it was beaten to pieces, huh? Uh... By who?"

"The creator god. I still don't know what in the world was wrong with it, but apparently they didn't like it... and I really was proud of it, too. Haaah."

The creator god, huh? Sounds like they're higher in status than even Father.

"Okay, you want the alarm clock for the first one, then. Sounds good to me!"

"Uh."

"Oh, and I guess you'll want the underwear for the second one? Do you want a fundoshi, boxers, or a babydoll dress? I've got something for men and women of all tastes. They're what I made the seventh piece of divine bedding to replace the alarm clock."

"Er, wait. I don't want the alarm clock, I want th—"

"Keima! KEEEIIMA! Come on, that's just, that's just going too far! Father, sorry! Could we ask for you to gift us with a quilt, your recommended quilt?!"

Rokuko forcibly covered my mouth with her hand. *Mghghgm. Well, alright. I don't want to argue with Father either.*

"Oh, really? It looks like Keima wants to say something."

"...Er, well, I just wanted to check something. I wasn't going to complain about getting the alarm clock. You recommend it yourself, after all."

"I see, I see! That's what I like to hear, ahahaha. So, that covers

your gifts. I think I'll give gifts to Aidy and Mikan too, plus Haku since she was put through a lot of trouble in more ways than one here. Keima got to ask for what he wanted, so well, let's keep it up. What do you three want?"

"Oh my! I can ask for anything?"

"Wow, really?! Thanks, papa! You're the best!"

"...Hm, I get a gift as well? I will have to think about this."

Aidy, Mikan, and Haku all rejoiced through the monitor at being given a gift. *Haku's acting like nothing happened at all, so maybe she's in a better mood now?*

"...In that case, I would like to have easier access to communication with Rokuko. Could you make Dungeon Battle calls usable between us at all times?"

"I want a Dungeon Master! Someone amazing like Keima! I-Is that too much to ask?"

"I would like.....————..... If you wouldn't mind. Also, if possible, could all video footage of me during this battle be deleted?"

The three of them asked for their gifts. Haku's first request was cut off in a storm of static. That was probably intentional jamming to hide what she said. The second half, Father agreed to as a bonus. Aidy seemed disappointed that the footage she went out of her way to record was deleted, but well. *Let's all pretend that never happened to Haku, okay? Okay.*

"Aha, you all asked for some pretty difficult things, huh? I'm really happy. Okay, leave it to me! Putting aside what Haku wanted, I can get that messaging system set up for you in no time, Aidy. It'll only take two or three days. Oh, Keima. Can I make that slave girl Mikan's Dungeon Master?"

"You talkin' 'bout me, dude?" Ichika said.

"Sorry, she's off limits."

"Figured. How about that Rinnew adventurer then, Mikan? She seems pretty good at organizing people."

"Sounds good to me!"

"Alright! I'll fiddle with fate and causality a little bit. Oh, and I'll toss in some support while I'm at it."

Father just casually talked about controlling fate and causality. I was also curious to know what he meant about support, but I decided to just pretend I hadn't heard anything.

"Oh, and Keima. Consider this a bonus," Father said, and a second later a pure white ball fell in front of me—a Dungeon Core.

...Oh yeah, it's been a year since the last one. I guess I can break another Core now and still be safe. Pretty sure Leona said I needed to wait a year to stop my soul from being corrupted by the God of Light, right?

"Oh, and don't expect an orichalcum sword this time. You'll want

to break it with one of your own weapons. That spell of yours will work too.”

Er, right. Guess he's not giving me that many favors.

“Wow! Is that a Dummy Core?” Mikan asked.

“Hm? Uhhh...”

Now that I think about it, I've told Mikan and Aidy that I'm from another world, but I haven't told them I'm a Hero. They might have noticed from me using {Ultra Transformation}, a Hero skill, but I don't want to run around calling myself a Hero if I can help it. Especially since they live and grow off killing Dungeon Cores... Yeah, I'm just gonna keep this to myself. No real point in me saying it anyway. I can break this and boost my Hero skill's level once I'm back home.

“Yep. Pretty sure this is a Dummy Core.”

“Wowee, cool. A free bonus! Papa sure is generous.”

“He sure is. Never met a more generous guy in my life. Rokuko, would you store this for me?”

“Oh, right.”

I handed the Dungeon Core to Rokuko. A glance at Father showed that his expression was unchanged. He had probably expected us to do exactly this.

“Okay, I think it's about time to wake Core 564 up,” Father said with a snap of his fingers. A call with Core 564 connected.

“Wha?! Er, uh... Wha...?! Ah! My left arm! I-It's still on me! Wait! What happened with the Dungeon Battle?!”

“Mmm! Ahahaha!” Aidy exclaimed giddily.

Core 564 panicked after waking up. Father had probably healed his arm at some point. Meanwhile, Aidy looked pretty excited. She had a nice smile on her face.

“Wh-Wh-What?! I lost? Me? Why?! A 600 Core should never be able to beat a 500 Core! What did you do, you brat?!”

“Oh, what a splendid loser you are! Your barks of defeat are music to my ears! Aaah, yes, losers are best when they are pathetic just like this!”

“GRAAAAH!”

“Ahahaha! Ahahahaha! Oh, this feels too good! Tell me, loser! How do you feel? Frustrated? Sad? Pathetic? Tell me, how does it feel to lose a girl younger than you, to lose to a small rabbit? To lose, to lose, to lose so hard! You called for help only for them to dominate you themselves, requiring your opponents to save your life, then spare it just to mock you! By the way, you were a burden on Father! He had to get involved himself. Are you so embarrassed you might just kill yourself? Well, you can't! I defeated you. We defeated you! I suppose you know what that means, don't you?!”

“Curses, curses, CURSEES! Why, WHYYYY?!” Core 564 roared in

frustration at Aidy's taunting.

"Aaah, pathetic! I love how pathetic you are!" Aidy cackled. She sure was having fun.

"...Wow, Aidy's sure getting into this, huh?"

"Rokuko. You started this, fix it somehow."

"...If I hadn't said anything, she would have killed Core 564 to win, no? I just stepped in since I didn't think killing him would be necessary. That saved Core 564's life, and now Aidy's having fun. Isn't this a win-win?"

Well, if you call it a win-win after one of the people lost so bad they nearly died.

Core 564 was roaring "GRAAAH! I'll kill kill kill kill yooou!" through the monitor, while Aidy, with endless amusement, was replying "Ah, the words of a complete weakling! You have a talent for being a small fry!"

Hmmm, this is kinda heating up. Not that I really mind. If they start fighting to the death, all I ask is they do it somewhere far away from me.

"Okay, okay, that's enough of that for now. Mind if I talk for a second?"

"...F-Father?! S-Sir, yes, sir...!"

"Ah, my apologies, Father. Teasing Core 564 was just so much fun I lost myself in it."

It was only then that Core 564 realized Father was watching and bowed his head quietly. Though I should note he was bowing so deep he was practically groveling. I couldn't really blame him, considering he made a total fool out of himself with the boss of all the Dungeon Cores watching him. Tough luck, buddy.

"Yep, sorry to say it, Core 564, but you lost. A lot sure happened at the end there, but do you remember any of it?"

"Sir...! My humblest apologies! I let myself fail, never thinking for a moment you yourself were watching! Just thinking back to it makes me want to explode with anger! To think that woman would betray me at the last moment!"

Is he trying to push his failure on Leona? Honestly, he would have lost even worse if Leona hadn't been there.

"What do you think, Core 6?" Father asked.

"Sir. I think it's out of the question. Listen, Core 564. You may not have known Father was watching, but you cannot pretend to have not known I was watching. And yet, you still asked for the help of Chaos."

"....."

Core 564 fell silent. *Yeah, Core 6 did pop up at the greeting before the battle started. And I'm pretty sure you said you'd offer up this victory to him? No wriggling you way out of this one.*

Also, Chaos? That's probably referring to Leona, but from the sound of

it Core 6 the Great Demon King has some kind of bad history with her just like Haku does. Asking for help from someone your boss hates sure is a big-time mistake.

“I-I have no excuse...!”

“Hmph. I wasn’t expecting anything from you to begin with. After all, you were facing Core 666 here—Aidy. And with the Dungeon Master from Haku helping her, not even a 500 Core stood a chance. Even a 400 Core... no, a 300 Core would have had a hard battle. Isn’t that right, Keima?”

“Er, um, well. It’s all thanks to Aidy. Ahahaha.”

“Quite. You have a good head on yourself for a member of the Traitor faction. Thinking back, your leadership during this battle was exemplary. What say you join my faction?”

“Hold it right there, Core 6. What makes you think for a second I would let you steal someone from my faction? It seems you have a death wish.”

“Heheh. I’ll give you Core 564 in return, eh?”

“I don’t need trash like him. Keima, don’t even think about agreeing to leave. Your talents will be best exploited, ahem, best used under my command.”

Haku. You just said “exploited,” right? You’re planning to work me to death? Are you still mad about the whole vine thing? I knew it.

“Anyway. Listen, Core 564. Do you know why you lost?” Father interjected.

“Naturally, because that foolish woman came a—”

“Aah, I’m talking about before your rampage. You already lost before she got involved, didn’t you?”

Core 564 had started to blame Leona, but Father stopped him. He couldn’t keep making excuses after that. All he could do was press his head against the ground like he was digging into it.

“...F-Forgive me! I cannot tell... I thought my dungeon was perfect! Over the past one hundred years, it has a perfect record of defeating proud adventurers of great skill!”

Er, yeah, adventurers are one thing. But this was a Dungeon Battle.

“Keima. Could you tell him why he lost?”

“...For free?”

“Um, Keima?!” Rokuko butted in, but I wasn’t gonna budge on this. I held out a hand to hold her back.

“I just gave you a bonus, didn’t I? Surely you don’t mind scratching my back a little in return.”

“Mmm. But if I tell him why he failed, he’ll be able to fight back better next time. What if he beats me next time just because I went out of my way to explain why he lost? And given where we are, this information is going to spread throughout the entire Demon King

faction. With the danger of that in mind this clearly is not a trade in my favor. I don't mind explaining, but I would like something that would make it worth my while in return."

"I see. That does make sense."

If I told him that he lost because his dungeon wasn't built for Dungeon Battles with Core 6 the Great Demon King watching, this information would spread throughout the entire Demon King faction... or well, that was the excuse I was running with, anyway. Core 6 was surely skilled enough to have identified the weakness here on his own. All I was doing here was trying to jack up the price of my information as high as possible to grab what I could. Especially since I wanted to sell before Core 6 had the chance to tell others and drop the price down to the mud.

"How about a Boss Monster Spawner, then?"

"...A Boss Monster Spawner? I don't see one of those in my catalog."

"It lets you spawn the monster registered with it, and it lets you respawn Named monsters for free. Well, it will only spawn one at any given time, and there's a cooldown timer depending on the strength of the boss. Anyway, I'll go ahead and give you a special one that lets you freely change which monster is registered to it."

...Whoa! That's actually pretty good. I could set our dungeon's Dragon Golem to it and use it for all sorts of things without worrying about remaking it from hand if it got broken. Or, more practically, I could make a golem of mythril... no, orichalcum, beat it myself, and have it respawn. It would be the birth of infinite orichalcum ore. Should be safe to say that'd be priceless.

"Errr, and I can swap the monster set to it?"

"That's right. Oh, but you can't change it during the cooldown time, and unlike Named resurrection they don't retain their memories."

Makes sense. So all the training you gave the monster would be reset. We could probably make up for that by controlling the monster in the Master Room. Either way, we would get as much orichalcum as we wanted. The cooldown timer is kind of concerning, though.

"If I set a dragon to it, for example, how long would the cooldown timer be?"

"A normal dragon would be a week, and a Red Dragon would be about two weeks. A Goblin King would only take about eight hours. You probably don't need to worry about the timer unless you're using a really special monster. Especially since you can speed it up with DP."

Alright, sounds pretty good. I think I'll take it.

"I would like two please, one for a mid-boss and one for a boss

monster.”

“Keima, has anyone ever told you that you have a heart of steel?” Father asked, a little exasperated. “That’s fine. But don’t get mad at me even if every Dungeon Core learns of this.”

“...I don’t mind, as long as you don’t go out of your way to spread it.”

And so, I got two Boss Spawners. *It’s all in how you negotiate.*

“Okay then, can you tell Core 564 what he did wrong?”

Now that I had been paid, I had no reason to refuse. I casually gave him the answer he wanted.

“...Basically, it’s as simple as the fact that dungeons strong against adventurers won’t always be strong in Dungeon Battles. The difference in invaders is just too high.”

“...That’s definitely true. If only Aidy and a few companions had invaded, Core 564 might actually have won this,” Father observed.

“Yup. Your strategy should change completely depending on whether you’re fighting a few enemies in a small team versus when you’re fighting an army. You just didn’t manage that.”

Father nodded in agreement. Core 564 listened silently. *I might as well say a bit more. He gave me two Spawners, after all.*

“The Demon King faction especially doesn’t seem to have a dungeon building philosophy built for dealing with numbers. But numbers are strength. As you just saw, a group that is weak individually can become strong by working together. Though it does take some time to learn how to manage it. So... was that enough?”

“Plenty. Thanks, Keima. Did you learn anything from that, Core 564?”

“Sir! Yes, Father! I believe he is exactly right!” Core 564 answered with his face on the floor. *Feels kinda like he’s just being forced to agree, but whatever. He said I’m right, and Father said I gave plenty of help. That’s the end of the deal. I’ve got nothing more to do with this.*

“I was surprised too, Rokuko. To think mere squirrels could prove so useful.”

“Eheheh, this is one of Keima’s best strategies, the human wave tactic. Though they’re not actually humans,” Rokuko explained to Aidy, full of pride. *My credit... Eh, fine. She’s my partner anyway.*

“Okay, I think I’ll let Core 6 and Haku say what they want to say. You can go first, Haku. Anything on your mind?”

“Father, if I may be honest, I just want to forget this Dungeon Battle ever happened.”

“Nonsense,” Core 6 interjected. “If you insist o—”

“Quiet, Core 6. I’m in the middle of speaking,” Haku said, and she appeared on our monitors. Despite the fact that Father was there Core 6 was annoyed enough at going second that he audibly clicked his

tongue. It wasn't hard to see how hostile their relationship was.

"Mmm, well, first of all. Good work, Keima. I'll deliver the Lionheart Bracelet to you later. And by the way, Father made it, so it's of even higher quality than Emmymephy's."

"Thanks."

"Second of all, forget everything you saw in the Boss Room."

"Huh? I'm not sure what you're talking about. It's been so long since I was there I don't remember anything about what happened."

"Good. And finally... as promised, I will accept you and Rokuko hugging, but nothing more."

Oh yeah. I totally forgot that was a thing.

"Sister! Are we not allowed to kiss?"

"You aren't. But I don't mind setting up a system where if you kiss me one hundred times, you can kiss him once."

Dang, since when was Haku so lustful? Oh right, she's always been like this.

"Rokuko, I too would like to have a tongue sword fight with you," Aidy said.

"Hm? Sorry, no can do. We're not sisters, we might make babies if we kiss."

I feel like something was off about that. Hold up, are duels equivalent to dates in the Demon King faction? Or is Aidy just like that because she's a Magic Blade-type Core?

"Oh, and Core 629. Mikan. Dedicate yourself to me through serving Keima," Haku said.

"Y-Yes ma'am! Looking forward to serving you, Keima!"

And suddenly I got a lackey out of nowhere. *Uh, what? I'm not going to do anything with him.*

"Now you may speak, Core 6."

Once Haku finished saying everything she wanted to, they changed places.

"Indeed. First, Aidy. You did well. I would expect nothing less from my grandchild."

"I am honored, Grandfather."

"As for you, Core 564." Core 6's words made Core 564 tremble on the ground where he was. "I never expected anything from you from the start, and while you were facing three Cores at once, I never expected you to lose to a 600 batch Core this magnificently. I won't take your life since Father saved you and Aidy spared you, but as I said prior to the battle, I will now expel you from my faction."

"P-Please wait! If you do that, what will become of me?!"

"I do not care. Know well that you are no longer under my protection. Do as you like. Though remember that you are hereby forbidden to name yourself as a member of the Demon King faction, or

a practitioner of Demon King style. Break this rule and I will crush you in an instant. Do not forget this,” Core 6 said before leaving abruptly. Core 564 could do nothing but stay frozen in place, dazed. *I bet things are gonna be real hard for you, but, well, good luck?*

...And that was when Father spoke up, with the corners of his lips lifted in a small grin for some reason. “Okay then, Core 564. I’ll give you two options.”

“F-Father! Wh-What would those two be?”

“One, you keep on living as a Dungeon Core. That’s basically me doing nothing and things just remaining as they are. Or two... You become Mikan’s Support Core. What do you think?”

Oh man, Mikan just frowned like, “I don’t need this guy’s help.” Can’t blame him, either. Who would want the help of an egotistical bully that put you through hell? Nobody, really.

“...What do you mean by that, Father?” Core 564 asked.

“Well, I just said I’d give Mikan a supporter as a gift, so. Mikan’s a rabbit-type Core, and he’s kind of lacking in raw power. That’s where you come in to support him. Both your dungeons are located pretty close to each other, so this is a perfect opportunity to Dual Link, isn’t it?”

What he was saying made sense, but Mikan was shaking his head pretty vigorously. *And what’s a Dual Link? Like are they literally linking themselves? Becoming a Dual Core?*

“Father. What does it mean to Dual Link?” Core 564 asked.

“Oh, right. You don’t know that. It basically just means two Cores connecting to manage one dungeon. Mikan will be the Main Core, and you’ll be the Support Core.”

“...So you ask me to serve that rabbit,” Core 564 said with a glare through the monitor that sent Mikan hiding behind Aidy.

“My my, Core 564. But won’t that be a perfect fit for you, since you lost to Mikan in this Dungeon Battle? A rabbit and a loser, could there be a better pair?”

“Gr...!”

“Nooooo! I don’t wanna pair up with this guuuy!”

“It’ll be fine, Mikan. Support Cores can’t defy Main Cores, and they can’t hurt them either,” Father said in a reassuring tone. *So basically, the Support Cores are slaves?*

“Help me, Keimaaa!”

“...Can’t you just order him to leave you alone until you call for him? He can be like, someone you only ever call over when you really need help in a fight.”

“Wow! So he can be just like a mercenary? Well, I think that’ll be fine.”

“Grr... V-Very well. This is humiliating, but it is my fault for losing

this battle. Father, I will become Core 629's... Mikan's Support Core."

"Alright, that settles that! Now I just need to get the Master in place and everything's perfect!"

And so, Core 564's fate was decided. In a way he had technically joined Haku's faction, and since she had just said she didn't need trash like him, her expression was a bit conflicted. *And wait, if Mikan's my subordinate now, and Core 564 is his support... Doesn't that mean Core 564 and I are connected now? Aw man...*

"Alright! Good work, everyone!" Father declared. He was probably feeling better than anyone else here.

...Oh, I just remembered, we've just left the Adventurers standing around this whole time. Heeey, Mikan, Aidy. And Core 564, I guess. Gimme some help. We need to make a big army of small fry to finish this ooooff.

Rokuko's Perspective

The Dungeon Battle ended safely, then the celebratory party ended, or at least, Rokuko left early. It was now her time to shine.

"Okay! It's finally the big day!"

Do you remember, by chance? The true power that the Divine Futon blanket has? Exactly one day per year, it lets you sleep in bed with any person you wish. (And due to the manipulation of fate and causality, nobody will interfere before morning.)

It had been a year since she last used it. Soon the power should be returning to it... Right? Rokuko picked up the futon blanket and patted it. Yeah, it was usable. It felt like it, anyway.

"...Last time went... Well, we had some problems, but this time I know all I need to know. Thank you, Redra. This time for sure, Keima and I will do... um, do the baby thing!" Rokuko declared. Despite talking to the air to pump herself up, she was still too embarrassed to say her plans outright.

Redra was the source of information. She was a Red Dragon, and the Dungeon Master of the neighboring [Flame Caverns]. She had a daughter named Igni. In other words, she was a veteran of love.

According to her, Rokuko just needed to kiss Keima, embrace him, then go with the flow. Kissing was the secret to everything. It was apparently fine for sisters to do, but given that Niku and Maiodore the archduke's daughter were engaged, it was risky for any two girls to kiss. Rokuko, a very smart girl, was naturally quick-witted enough to figure this out herself.

"...Oh great futon, oh great futon. I want to sleep with Keima!"

She prayed to the Divine Futon, and it shone brightly. It was the same light she had seen a year ago. In other words, it had activated.

By the way, Rokuko already had on her bedtime babydoll dress, and she was wearing the black thigh-high socks that Keima liked so much. Her underwear, too, was a sexy pair of lucky underwear she had prepared for this day in particular. Whoever coined the term “lucky underwear” must have had real life experience, Rokuko thought, because indeed she felt so nervous it was tempting to rely on luck.

Not too much later, a knock came on the door.

“Eep! I-Is that you, Keima?”

“Yep, it’s me.”

“The door’s unlocked!”

“Oh, really? I’ll go on in, then.”

Keima opened the door and came inside. He was wearing the same jersey he usually did.

“Heh heh. We got some more pieces of the Divine Bedding, huh, Rokuko? Dungeon Battles sure are worth doing.”

“Uh-huh. And since we got one each, you finally have one of your own.”

“That barely matters. You’ve got the futon blanket and the quilt, while I’ve got nothing but the alarm clock that’s not even part of the official set anymore.”

Indeed, that’s how they ended up getting split. Keima felt more than a little regret over not just immediately picking something he could use to help his sleep. Though it was hard to complain considering how lucky they were to get two.

“So, Keima, let’s show each other what we have.”

“Sure. Come forth, Divine Alarm Clock!” Keima declared while taking out the Divine Alarm Clock. It was round and analog, with a red body and a white clock face. The numbers one through twelve were written on it in black letters, and simple black arrows told what time it was. Beneath it were four sticks that served as legs, and the top had golden bells to make it into an alarm clock.

“And here. This is the Divine Quilt.”

What Rokuko took out was a beige quilt. At a first glance it was just a normal thick quilt covered in fur, but when touched you could feel the immense number of microfibers. Unlike the futon blanket, it had significant weight, but without being too heavy—it was just heavy enough to envelop the user in a sense of comfort.

“...Man, when you line them up like this, it really feels like the quilt’s the real ‘bedding’ here,” I said.

“True. You only use the alarm clock when you need to wake up, and it’s not actually a part of your bed or anything. It doesn’t touch you directly.”

“Yeah. Feels like that’s part of the reason it was removed from the

group.”

As they talked about the Divine Bedding, Rokuko casually made Keima sit next to her on the bed. There she noticed that Keima was wearing a bracelet on his left wrist, which had been hidden by his jersey.

“Oh, neat. Is that the [Lionheart Bracelet] that Haku gave you?”

“Yep. Apparently Father made it.”

“Wow, really? It looks so good on you, Keima.”

“You think so? Well, I’m gonna be hiding it under my sleeve either way. Apparently it blocks any kind of mental influence.”

...It was then that Rokuko realized that Keima was a lot more *sane* than he had been last year. She had thought that things would go smoothly this time since Keima had a piece of the Divine Bedding himself, but maybe it wouldn’t be so easy.

“.....”

“Hm? What’s up, Rokuko? Do you want it?”

“Er, um, well... I-I do want it! But he gave it to you, so.”

“Oh, nah, it’s just an accessory, I’m not too attached to it. How about you hold onto it for me? I’d be more relaxed if I knew you had it on you anyway.”

“Oh, um. Okay then,” Rokuko said, accepting the silver-colored bracelet from him. She put it on her wrist, her heart thumping from Keima’s body heat... and then noticed that he was staring at her.

“.....”

“K-Keima?”

“Y-Yeah? What’s up?”

“You were kinda dozing off there...”

“Er, well. I was kinda just enraptured by the sight of you.”

“What?! O-Oh, okay! Neat, coooool, uh-huuuuh!”

Rokuko averted her eyes, unable to keep looking at him. Her cheeks were flushed red. Keima had probably lost control of himself a bit after removing the bracelet.

...Rokuko changed the subject to avoid her embarrassment. “B-By the way. What special effect does the alarm clock have? The quilt apparently negates attacks entirely. And it calms you down.”

“It negates attacks? Nutty. That’s a piece of the Divine Bedding for you. The alarm clock cures all sorts of different status ailments.”

If you thought about it, sleepiness was kind of like a status effect that could be blocked with {Sleep Resistance}. It made sense that the Divine Alarm Clock could force you to feel good after waking up if it could “cure” your sleepiness.

“Incidentally, although it has bells on it, if you set it to electric sounds, you can set it to go off after twelve hours too. You can even set it to go off even a century in the future.”

“Wait, the clock face is just for show?”

“Well, you can still use it as a normal clock too. It’s pretty convenient since it automatically keeps the time accurate on its own,” Keima said, but he was staring off into the distance.

“It being a good alarm clock is more than enough, isn’t it? Is there something you don’t like about it?”

“Er, well, the effect happens when it makes a sound, but...”

“Oh, that makes sense. What kind of sound does it make?”

“Uhhhh... Well, have a listen yourself. Ring in ten seconds,” Keima said to the alarm clock. That’s how long it took before some quiet beeping filled the room. He immediately slammed a hand down on the alarm clock to stop the sound. A second later, Rokuko realized the bit of sleepiness she had been feeling was entirely gone.

“I see. It is pretty quiet.”

“Yep. The sound doesn’t matter much since you wake up from the status effect canceling. But as you can probably tell, it clears out your head and makes you feel pretty wide awake. Definitely not something to use right before bed.”

“Now I know why Father was so proud of it,” Rokuko said with a nod and a pleasantly clear head.

“So, you think this will help me sleep?”

“...Oh! Now that you mention it, you definitely can’t sleep with this thing.”

“It’s the one and only flaw of this alarm clock, but it’s fatal. This isn’t bedding at all. It’s a tool for waking up.”

“Wow. Uh-huh, I totally see your point.”

Still, Rokuko thought that since it would help you wake up no matter what when you needed to be awake, it should count as bedding. Though maybe the fact that it made you think of waking up at all disqualified it from being Divine Bedding.

“Anyway, I’m wide awake now, so I’m gonna head back to my room. Thanks for showing me your bedding.”

“Um, you’re welcome?”

“Peace, Rokuko. See you tomorrow,” Keima said before leaving the room with a bright expression.

Rokuko was left sitting in the room alone.

“...Wait, what? Wh-Why? What about the futon’s effect?”

The Divine Alarm Clock. It cured all sorts of status ailments, even the ailment induced by the Divine Futon. Upon realizing this, Rokuko exploded and spoke without thinking. “THE ALARM CLOCK ISN’T BEDDING!”

Her words defied the will of Father. And yet, she could not help but speak her mind.

Still, Rokuko wasn’t about to let things end there. She thought for

a bit after Keima left the room, then left herself, determined to sleep together no matter the cost. Her mind was set on that and nothing would shake her out of it. But Keima had left. Desire and frustration was boiling within her. What was she to do, then? There was only one answer! Go to him herself! And so, Rokuko went to Keima's room to launch a nighttime advance.

"I'm coming in, Keima!"

"Whoa! H-Hold on a second!"

Keima's voice had a bit of panic to it when he told her to wait, so she paused for a good ten seconds before going inside. The room he had been given was mostly empty like a bare storeroom. There wasn't anything fancy like a bed; there was just a single futon spread out on the ground. The fact that even a room like that had an expensive glass window just went to show how fancy the Ivory Villa was.

And inside was Keima sitting on his futon in his jersey. "Rokuko, huh? What's up?"

"Um, well..."

Rokuko would have a much easier time of this if she could just honestly say she had come to sleep with him. But she couldn't, and she had been too reckless coming here without a plan. Still, an idea came to her at just the right moment.

"Thanks to you, I can't sleep. Take responsibility and use Siesta on me."

Indeed. If she had been made wide awake from her sleepiness being taken away, then all she needed was to have sleepiness forced back into her. And Keima had a Magic Blade that did just that.

Keima was moved by her idea. "Wow, I totally forgot that was an option. Alright, let's head back to your room."

"There's a futon right here. We can stay."

"Uh."

"Got a problem?"

"...This is a weird coincidence, but I don't have any spares. There's only one futon here."

"...Oh! Wooow, huh."

Suddenly, it hit Rokuko. The effects of the Divine Futon were still alive. Thus spake the Divine Futon: Thou shalt sleep together, for it is fate.

"Keima, get Siesta out and lay down."

"Er, sure."

Keima set Siesta beside the pillow and laid face up on the futon. Rokuko grinned.

"Oooh no, sorry, I triiipped!"

"Nghuh!"

Rokuko fell toward Keima in what was very obviously a deliberate

move. Her elbow perfectly forced its way into his stomach.

By yet another coincidence, Keima was wearing the jersey that Father had fixed after it was broken in the Dungeon Battle, and due to that the Wearable Golem had its support training reverted back to its initial state. And Keima hadn't re-input the training yet, since he could just do that when he got home. Thanks to that, despite having nimbly dodged the blazing fast attacks of tentacles previously, he couldn't even react to Rokuko's lazy elbow and ended up taking it head-on.

"Ngh, ngggh!"

"Oh, sorry, Keima! Does it hurt? It must hurt! That's a lot of damage! We need to use the Divine Futon blanket to heal it! Oh, and Siesta, blast out your sleepiness at full power!" Rokuko declared when crawling onto the Futon beside Keima and pouring mana into Siesta beside the bed. At the same time, she took out her Divine Futon blanket and laid it over her and Keima.

"Wait, what're yo— zzz..."

"Night, Keima... zzz..."

The sleepiness from Siesta hit both Keima and Rokuko. And thus, Rokuko succeeded in sleeping next to Keima.

* * *

They found themselves in the world of dreams. It was a space made by Rokuko, for Rokuko was using the power of the Divine Futon.

"Why hello theeere, Keima."

"Hey, Rokuko. Mind telling me what's going on here?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Sheesh... Eh, never mind. This is just a dream anyway. I won't get good answers from you no matter what I ask."

Incidentally, after much consideration following last time, Rokuko settled on making this dream one where Keima would remember it as a dream, but she would remember it clearly as fact. Thus, this time she wouldn't be using it as a paradise to change his clothes as much as he wanted. Though if Keima wanted to do that himself, it was totally fair game.

"But you know, Keima, what is this I'm wearing...?"

"....."

Rokuko was wearing the same thing she had been wearing before bed. It was the babydoll dress she had carefully picked above all other options earlier. Even though this was supposed to appear like Keima's dream, she was wearing what he wanted her to wear.

"Did you like it that much? Hm, hmmm?"

"Y-Yeah, I did. So what? Don't come to my room wearing a dress like that. What if someone saw you?"

“What does it matter to me if someone sees?” Rokuko asked, and Keima looked away.

“...I don’t want anyone else seeing you in that. Sheesh,” he muttered.

Oh my goodness. It was a true shame that she couldn’t use the dungeon’s recording function in the dream world.

“Keima, Keima, what was that? Could you say it again?”

“No way. It’s embarrassing.”

“Awww, what? Come on, do iiiit,” Rokuko said before clinging to Keima. She looked up at him while rubbing her decently sizable chest against him. The sound of a thumping heart could be heard. Whether it was Rokuko’s or Keima’s, nobody knew.

Rokuko steeled her resolved and spoke. “Keimaaa... Kiss me?”

“Your feet?”

In Rokuko’s opinion, it would have been totally fair game for her to punch Keima there.

“Why feet? Come on. I’m talking about my lips. Are you dumb? You have to be dumb.”

“Nah, I mean, if I have a choice, I kinda want to kiss your feet. And I mean, this is my dream, isn’t it?”

“.....”

“.....”

They looked at each other for a bit... or rather, they glared at each other, until Rokuko eventually let out a sigh.

“Oh, fine... This is your dream after all.”

“Yep. I definitely couldn’t do this with the real Rokuko. Might as well enjoy the dream while it lasts,” Keima said, sounding invested. Rokuko realized that maybe when Redra said “go with the flow,” she meant let him kiss her feet. Aaand there he was, going for her feet already.

“Hold on. I don’t mind you kissing my feet, but first... I want a kiss on the lips.”

“Sure,” Keima said, before immediately pressing his lips against Rokuko’s.

“Nmmm...! Nnn, nnn...!”

After some sweet suffocation, their lips parted and Rokuko gasped for air. However...

“...Um, one more time? This time while we hug tightly,” Rokuko asked cutely, and Keima silently replied with his mouth.

.....

“Hey, Rokuko.”

Rokuko awoke to the feeling of being poked in the cheek.

“Nnnm, ah... Did I pass out? Nmm...”

“Rokuko? H-Hey, nmgh?!”

Keima's head was right in front of Rokuko. She wrapped her arms around it, pulled him to her, and kissed him so many times she couldn't even count how many it was. The sensation of kissing brought a smile to her face. They had gotten carried away by the flow earlier and ended up kissing in all sorts of places beyond just lips and feet, but in the end kissing on the lips was the best in Rokuko's opinion. Though Keima seemed to want to go after her feet more than anything.

"...Pwaah! Aahh... That tasted so good..." Rokuko sighed with a dreamy smile as she let Keima's head go.

"U-Uh, Rokuko? Are you half-asleep or something...?"

"...Bwuh?" she said in a cracked voice, now seeing with widened eyes that Keima was blushing bright red. *Wow, that's weird. Keima only blushed like that during the first ten or so kisses. And is it just me, or is the aftertaste more realistic than before? Oh, and when did we move to the futon? Oh, and why is the light from the window so bright?*

Oh. Ooooh... THIS. IS. REAL. LIFE?

The moment Rokuko realized what had happened, her own face went bright red.

"K-Keima?! Wh-Whoops, um, I-I thought you were a big melon roll!"

"O-Oh, huh! A melon roll, that makes sense! We definitely ate some of those in the dream!"

"Yep, that's right! Woow, those were some amazing melon rolls! Ahaha, what a blunder I've just made!"

"Hey, nobody can blame you! Who wouldn't go after a big melon roll right in front of them!"

Rokuko flung off the futon blanket and leapt into a sitting position where she proceeded to make excuses. Keima did the same, sitting in front of her and nodding in agreement. Both of their faces were crimson. Rokuko was a bit teary-eyed, too.

Once they had finished their excuses, they awkwardly avoided eye contact and shuffled around so their backs were facing each other.

"...I'll go kiss Haku a hundred times later."

"Y-Yeah..."

And so concluded the night after the Dungeon Battle.



Side Chapter — A Hundred Kisses

It happened after the Dungeon Battle was over, but a bit before Keima's party left to go home. Or to be more specific, it was the morning after Rokuko and Keima slept together in the same bed.

"Sister. Let's kiss," Rokuko said instead of preparing to leave.

"What?!" Haku exclaimed with a twitch, her body trembling with shock. She was so shaken that she accidentally ripped in half the document she had been looking at. "K-K-K-K-Kiss? By kiss you mean, that kind of kiss, yes?"

"Hm? Um, what other kinds of kisses are there, sister?"

"Mmm?! None, none at all. Um... What? Is this a dream? Is this some special effect of Father's sofa?"

Haku certainly had gotten drunk at the celebration, before eventually waking up the next morning on the sofa Father had given her. She had felt great after waking up, which was unusual, and also meant there was at least a small percentage chance, no, about a fifty percent chance that it was responsible for Rokuko saying that.

"Hm. Hmmhmm. Cough. Ummmmmmmm. Well."

"Here I go, Sister."

"Nmmm?!"

Rokuko climbed onto Haku's desk and pressed her lips against hers while she was still sitting in her office chair. It was a basic kiss that involved nothing more than touching lips.

"...Mmm?!"

"Well, that's one. Time for two. Mmm."

"Wait wait wait, Rokuko, wait! Give me ten, no, at least five minutes!"

Haku held up a hand to stop Rokuko from kissing her a second time, then left her seat.

What what WHAT?! What's going on?! Is this a dream? Is it real life? Ah! AAAAH!

Haku, in a panic due to the lingering warmth on her lips, rushed to the bathroom and brushed her teeth intensely. She cast {Purification} to finish the job, then checked her face in the mirror to make sure she looked fine. Her ears and cheeks were fine, aside from being bright red. Her breath smelled fine.

After brushing her hair with her hands just to be safe and calm herself down, she returned to her seat in the administrative room

where Rokuko was waiting. And there she was, quietly waiting, not a figment of Haku's imagination at all.

"...M-My apologies for the wait."

"Welcome back, Haku. Let's get back to it."

"Y-Yes, indeed... Um, Rokuko? Where's all this coming from," Haku asked, and Rokuko tilted her head.

"You said I could kiss Keima if I kissed you one hundred times first, didn't you?"

"...Now that you mention it, I did say that." Indeed, she remembered it clearly. And there Haku finally understood that Rokuko was trying to kiss her one hundred times so she could kiss Keima.

"Okay, let's get back to it! There's still ninety-nine left, Haku!"

"R-Right, I understand, I know, bu— Mnggh?!"

Haku once again had her lips forcibly stolen. Rokuko was being shockingly aggressive. It was so intense that Haku felt that she might fall unconscious. But at the same time, she had to stay conscious no matter the price. She was resolved to experience this for as long as she could, even if it killed her.

"Fwaah! Oh, and kissing places other than the lips still counts as kisses, right?"

"Wait, nmm! Kyaah, ah, aah, n-not there!"

Rokuko launched a flurry of kisses onto Haku's cheeks and neck. Haku could do nothing but sit and take it as she trembled, wondering where Rokuko had learned such techniques. She certainly hadn't taught her to do any of this.

All Haku had taught her was some basic sexual education, just to ensure no accidents were to happen. She taught her that sexual reproduction was an act that relieved the body by expelling dirty juices, and that one was to view their sexual partner as a trash can. Men doing it to women were pure evil, and they should be refused no matter what. And that ultimately, it was meant to expel waste, and doing any more than that was the act of beasts. She also taught her that kissing was for people who liked each other, that gender didn't matter when it came to kissing, and that sisters could kiss as much as they liked.

It was mostly a manipulative view of sex made technically not false by exploiting the difference between humans and human-type Dungeon Cores. And yet, how had Rokuko learned to give such passionate, fervent kisses from such basic sexual education? All she could think of was that Keima or someone in Goren had taught her. Perhaps it was the work of the Succubi that Leona had left there.

Ah, yes. That was it, no doubt about it. *Curse you, Leona! How dare you defile my sweet little Rok—* Haku thought before being abruptly

interrupted by the sensation of a wet, warm thing going into her ear.

“Hyaaaahiih?! R-Rokuko, not theeeere...”

“You certainly, shlpph, have clean ears, don’t you? They taste like you.”

Haku’s thoughts were scattered by the wet sounds of a tongue digging into her ear as up-close whispers echoed within, her brain trembling with bliss. Her beloved Rokuko’s whispers and cute tongue played a symphony accompanied by body heat and hot breathing which shook her brain more than she ever thought possible.

My ear hole, feels amazing! Ah, ah, licking, hyaagh, ah, ngh, the licking, feels amazing...! It’s so loud I can’t hear anything else! My ears are being dominateed!

“N-No, Rokuko... My, my ears are too weak! I’ll crumble if you keep licking them...!”

“Oh, are these your weak spot? I wonder what will happen if I do this, then... Nom.”

“Hyaah?! Y-You bit, my eaaar, hyaaaah!”

She was melting. Rokuko was melting Haku’s brain.

Haku could do nothing but sit and weather Rokuko’s storm of kisses, unable to hide her bright-red face and ears, nor hide the sensual storm of expressions flashing across her face. *This is, too much, it’s just, I’m going to lose my mind!*

“...And that’s one hundred.”

“...Ah...”

And so, after the promised one hundred kisses were over, Rokuko pulled her face back from Haku’s with an embarrassed expression. Meanwhile, Haku was limply slumped against her wet chair, staring at the ceiling in such a daze she couldn’t even lift her arms.

“...Haku, you’re drooling.”

“E-Eek! R-Rokuko... When did you get so mature?!”

“Ahaha. I’m growing up too, you know!” Rokuko replied with a smug expression despite having not answered Haku’s question at all.

And then, Rokuko realized something. She looked at Haku and licked her lips. The sight of that sent a sweet shudder down Haku’s spine.

“If I kiss you lots ahead of time, that’s more kisses I can have with Keima later... Let’s go another one hundred. Or maybe two hundred? No, no, three hundred... one thousand?”

“Eep?!”

In the end, Haku was dominated so thoroughly by Rokuko that she didn’t even have the strength to see her and Keima’s party off. How many times did Rokuko kiss her in the end? That will forever be a secret between just the two of them.

Afterword

A coworker of mine recommended a novel to me the other day. And indeed, that novel was *Lazy Dungeon Master*. I didn't tell him that I was the writer. This is just my second job, so yeah, it's kinda awkward. I'm thinking I'll tell him if I ever become a full-time writer.

...Or wait, maybe he knew the whole time? Have I been found out? Okay, let's not think about this. It's not healthy to make too many assumptions without evidence. No doubt this was a pure, legendary-class coincidence. This is a popular series that made it all the way to Volume 11, after all! Nothing weird about someone recommending it. Yep.

Oh, right, this is Volume 11's afterword. Thank you for reading once again. We held back its release a bit on purpose so it could be sold next to the manga edition in stores. Okay, that's not true. I just couldn't make it in time since I needed to basically write two volumes for what was planned to be just one... Hahaha, what a good joke by me. Ahaha. Hah...

Anyway, I would like to keep working hard for *Lazy Dungeon Master*'s sake. I hope you'll support me by reading the manga version too. Youta-san, Nanaroku-san, thank you for your work. My editor I-san seems like he's having a hard time. Good luck to you, my friend.

Oh, and this volume had a lot more pages than normal, but that's just because I wrote too much. I couldn't really cut any of the final parts here. And if I wasn't willing to cut anything, I just had to be willing to write more pages than normal. But due to that extra content, the price is a bit higher than normal (in Japan). Though if you added this to Volume 7 and divided by two, the results probably wouldn't be too out there. The page count and all that.

...And here I was, thinking that since most of this is in the web novel, I could just finish in no time with a bit of extra writing. Well, I'm no stranger to putting myself in a pickle due to writing more than expected. Even when I go out of my way to plan ahead. What's the point of plans if they never work out, anyway...? Guuuuh.

From this point on, there will be spoilers for Volume 11. People who skipped here before reading the volume itself should probably do a U-turn. Okay, everyone got that? I've warned you. I'm seriously gonna start spoiling, so leave now if you don't want that. If you're one of those people who complain about afterwords having spoilers, go try

writing an afterword of your own and see how hard it is to come up with anything to say if you can't even talk about the volume itself. I've got a mountain of lore here and I won't ever be able to talk about it otherwise. Anyway, here we go.

This is basically the second half of the last volume and its journey to the imperial capital. That said, since there's a clean delineation between the journey to the capital and what happens at the capital, they aren't actually too connected. The main thing that changed was adding some foreshadowing in Volume 10 for a certain God of Chaos appearing here, and letting a certain imperial princess appear again after being oddly popular in her introductory volume.

...Yeah, this volume is an example of how changing stuff early will result in big changes later. The God of Chaos worked mostly behind the scenes in the web novel, so this is probably going to have a big influence in a lot of places moving forward.

There were also a lot of good scenes captured in the illustrations. I actually spent a lot of time debating over which scenes should get the illustrations this time. I'm really looking forward to the manga edition of this arc. Real deal hype. I have no idea when it's going to reach this point, though.

Also, Rokuko called Keima over to a dream using her Divine Futon again, but she seceded authority in the dream to let Keima do as he wished... which involved kissing feet and nothing more. In a way I have to say that Keima missed a big opportunity to go all the way here despite being so competent in the Dungeon Battle, but well, I would actually love for someone to turn this situation into a porn manga. And then I would love for them to give me a volume of it. I'd be overjoyed. I would treasure it.

Sure, the official word of god is that they didn't go all the way, but you can just ignore that. Ignoring official lore is the beauty of derivative fan works. You can do whatever you want and treat it as just a parallel world, an alternate telling of what could have happened. Man, do I love derivative fan works. Maybe people will start making porn manga of *LDM* if it gets an anime? I hope it gets an anime. I-san, I believe in you making that happen. And the God of Chaos is begging for it too, I promise.

...Anyway, I got off track there, but it's safe to say that Keima and Rokuko's relationship is still pure. This is an all-ages work, after all. No matter what anyone says, no matter how Succuma looked in that one pre-order bonus poster, no matter how lewd the illustrations are—this is a work for people of all ages. Keima's a guy, so the art can be a little more risque with him. I refuse to accept any argument here. Mainly because there would be problems if I did, but regardless, I refuse. Okay? Okay.

Oh right, I nearly forgot to mention this. The lyrics to the song “A Loving Rabbit’s Always Straightforward” were written by my friend, T-san. I appreciate him responding to my ridiculous request so quickly. I’m not too good at lyrics, so letting someone else take care of them is just efficient.

Also, I modeled Core 629 the orange rabbit off one I know in real life, but I guess nobody will really care about that. Yeah.

Okay. Next up is differences between this and the web novel. First is Leona. I planned on her showing up in the light novel adaptation all the way back when I first wrote the web novel without her. In fact, the plot of the LN has been diverging from the WN ever since Leona appeared in Volume 6. (Though if you go all the way back to the start of everything, the first major change was Rokuko ostentatiously welcoming Keima in her older form after summoning him.)

As for Wataru, he lost his place in this volume due to Leona’s chaos messing things up. If not for that, he could have lined up next to Emmymephy in a wondrous display of wotagei. Perhaps Wataru would have had some things to say about wotagei. Well, Keima would probably wiggle out by making some excuse about the auto-translator just happening to use that word.

One idea I had, then rejected, was Emmymephy forming an idol unit with Ichigo. That would have introduced the possibility of Emmymephy becoming Mikan’s master... Yeah, I feel like getting too far away from the web novel might cause a lot of big problems in more ways than one, so that just wouldn’t fly. That might introduce a future where an entire volume is original content, plot developments unique entirely to it... Just like Volume 8 pretty much was. Maybe the next volume might be the same way?

Oh, it looks like I’m out of lines. Guess that’ll be all from me this time. May we meet again next volume.

Supana Onikage

Bonus Short Stories

Event Rewards

“Keimaaa. I wanna talk to you about some dungeon stuff,” Core 629 AKA Mikan said, hopping over to me while I was hanging out in his dungeon, the [Rabbit Rest Spot].

“Yeah? What’s up?” I replied.

“It’s about the event rewards!”

“Right, the stuff we give for the raids?”

I was producing the [Rabbit Rest Spot], and there were regular events where the Safe Zone would be raided by monsters. If the adventurers there could fight them all off, the rabbits would reward them with a gift as a sign of their thanks.

“Right now we’re giving them potions, but there’s just too many people! I wanna reward everyone who joins in, but... but... a potion just for participating is too expensive! I was hoping you would have some idea of what else we could give them.”

“Ahhhh.”

It was true that potions were 150 DP each. Even considering that the adventurers were earning Mikan DP just by existing, most weren’t particularly strong. Giving a potion to every single participant would put him in the red.

“But, y’know, you don’t have to give everyone stuff.”

“Awww... But there are some people who wanna fight but can’t do much, like me! I wanna give them rewards too.”

That was a kind desire, one someone probably wouldn’t have if they weren’t weak themselves, like Mikan was.

“...In that case, won’t anything do? Give ’em some acorns or something.”

“Cheapskate! Keima, you cheapskaaate!” Mikan stamped his feet.

“Hey, it’s better than nothing, isn’t it?”

“What are they gonna use acorns for?! It’s more insulting than giving them nothing!”

“Acorns not having any use is why they would be good,” I said, surprising Mikan so much he stopped stamping his feet.

“Whaddaya mean by that?”

“Think about it. Let’s say we gave them each a carrot. They could give it to the rabbits or eat it themselves.”

“Uh-huh. That’d be good.”

“But once the carrots are gone, they’re gone for good.”

“Yup. That’s what happens when you eat something.”

“What about an acorn, though?”

You couldn’t really do anything with an acorn. And since you couldn’t do anything, it stuck around with you. Though there were some people who ate them.

“You don’t need lasting gifts to remember things, but it’s definitely easier to remember something if you keep something with you.”

“That’s true...”

“They might glance at their acorn, remember this dungeon, and come back for another visit.”

“That’s true!” Mikan jumped for joy, his ears flapping.

“It could be like a good luck charm or something. Hey, maybe have the rabbits polish it with their fur before handing it over or something.”

“Oooh! That’s a good idea, I wanna polish some acorns with my ears!”

And so acorns began to be included as a lesser tier of raid rewards.

* * *

“Whew. Looks like we managed to save the rabbits again.”

“Yup. But we didn’t even need to get involved.”

This was a conversation between two mages, who had stood at the ready in the back row throughout the raid, but had ultimately done nothing since the front row had managed to clear all the monsters on their own.

They watched as rabbits with baskets on their backs hopped around, giving potion rewards to the people who fought in the raid.

“Looks like the rabbits are passing out potions again.”

“So cute... Sigh, I wish we would get some presents from a rabbit too.”

That said, they had protected the rabbits, and that was good enough for them. So it was a surprise when a rabbit hopped up to them, too.

“Oh?”

“Hm?”

The rabbit dropped acorns out of its mouth onto the ground in front of them. Then it dexterously used its front paws to rub the acorns against its face, polishing them. Once it was done, it pushed the polished acorns to the two mages, as if offering them up to them.

“Er, you’re giving these to us?”

“Oh, oooh...! Acorns from a rabbit!”

The mages picked up their acorns.

“...Y’know, this is pretty nice.”

“Yeah. It’s real nice.”

They didn’t have any use in particular for the acorns, but still, they were happy to get them. They were so happy they ordered extra vegetable sticks to give the rabbits.

At the time, nobody expected that the sincerity of the acorns would make them a more popular gift than the potions. But considering the acorns were born from Mikan’s sincere goodwill, perhaps that made perfect sense.

Doggy Girl Idol

“You know, Keima, I want to raise an idol too,” Rokuko said out of nowhere after I had finished raising Ichigo into an idol and watched her perform a few live shows.

“Oh yeah? And why is that?”

“Controlling rabbits and interacting with customers is neat, but your work seems a lot more fun.”

“Ah, well, can’t really deny that.”

There were entire video games based on raising idols, after all. Entire series, even. It only made sense that it would be fun, and I could say from experience that it was a good time.

Not to mention that Rokuko raising an idol would honestly be pretty beneficial. Ichigo could form a two-person unit with the new idol, or maybe they could have epic singing battles on stage.

“Guess I’ll summon another War Rabbit for 50,000 DP. Not sure if you’ll have the time to finish raising her before the big battle, though.”

“No need for that! I’ve already scouted out a girl that’s like a big ball of idol talent,” Rokuko said with a smug smile.

“Really?! I’m impressed, Rokuko... or I would be if you talked to me before doing that.”

“Bwuhwuhwuhw?!”

I pinched and pulled Rokuko’s soft cheeks. *Dang, these are squishy.*

“I-I mean, you looked busy! And I was bored!”

“Too busy to talk about this for one second? I don’t think so.”

“Every time I tried mentioning it you were training Ichigo, and you told me to *never* interrupt when you were training her.”

...Okay, fair. I didn’t want there to be any chance of her barging in when I was transformed into Succuma.

Incidentally, being charmed boosted one’s ability to learn dances and songs. Charms are really effective for training, ’cause like, think about it. Don’t you work way harder when it’s for the sake of who you love? I could have just had Ichigo perform the dances through golem

assistance, but I didn't want to spill the beans on Wearable Golems if I could help it.

"So, who'd you scout and where?"

"Heh, heh, heh! It's someone you know very well, Keima... COME FORTH!" Rokuko declared, and in came Niku.

But she was wearing frilly, fancy clothing—an idol outfit Rokuko had gotten from who-knows-where.

"Master... Teehee!"

"Well, you almost smiled, at least?" *I can tell she's smiling from her ears and tails, but her face is as expressionless as ever. I guess that's not a bad look overall.*

"Niku is spry as heck, and she's just as cute as Ichigo if you ask me. Not to mention that fighting rabbit ears with dogs ears is pretty clever, don't you think?" Rokuko asked.

"...Putting aside whether it's clever, Niku definitely is cute. I would expect nothing less from our poster girl."

"Riiight?!" Rokuko exclaimed. Niku gave a small bow.

"She's a great dancer, too! Show him what you can do, Niku!"

"Okay."

And so, Niku danced the idol dance I made up for Ichigo's debut song, "A Rabbit in Love is Always Straightforward." ...*Wait, is that a Wearable Golem she has on? I don't think so. Oh man, that's some perfect choreography. Though it's kind of weird to see a dog girl doing a rabbit dance.*

Once she was done dancing, Niku gave another bow. "How was it...?"

"Yep, perfect. Good work. You're something else, I'm honestly moved."

I had to give my honest praise. It had taken Ichigo several days to learn that song and dance. Apparently Niku had memorized it by watching Ichigo perform at her first few shows. However.

"You know we can't have Niku appear as an idol here, right? Or do you want us to leave her in the imperial capital?"

"...Ah?!"

Yep, Niku's my dakimakura and the mascot of the Dancing Doll Inn. Her place wasn't in the imperial capital performing as a dog girl idol. Even if we did put her on stage as an idol, all that would do is make it harder for us to travel back to Goren. We'd need to start thinking of alibis and excuses for our traveling.

"Master... Am I no good...?"

"You're great, Niku. That song and dance was top class. Show me again sometime, okay?"

"...Okay."

I patted Niku's head and she wagged her tail happily.

“Okay, then I’ll do it! I’ll become an idol!”

“No, you’d be even more problematic than Niku. You’re a Dungeon Core, you need to stay back and out of sight.”

“Guh,” Rokuko groaned. “Um, in that case, well... Could I become an idol just for you...?” Rokuko looked up at me with tearful eyes. *An idol just for me? That doesn’t sound so bad...*

“Niku and I will sing and dance just for you. How does that sound?”

“Er, well, not bad at all, but... What’s the point?”

“I’ll take that as a yes. So, can I ask you to do something...?”

In the end, Rokuko asked me to work out an idol production schedule for her. But I managed to squeeze out of her that this was all pretext, and in reality she just wanted to see me (Succuma) perform mini-shows for her.

“Please, Keima! Show me! Charm me!”

“Hell no! Never!” *This is the one thing I will never budge on. Transforming into a Succubus is real freaking embarrassing!*

And well... all that being said, between you and me I was a little relieved to see that even though Rokuko was getting a lot smarter lately, she was still a bit of a doofus sometimes.

Daide Investigation Report

Wataru was visiting the country of Daide at the request of Haku. Apparently the influence of an evil god was beginning to take root in the country, and his highest priority was investigating what exactly was going on. That said, he hadn’t been given any specific task in particular to work on.

“Mmm, what should I be searching for? Hey, you. Do you have any ideas?”

“Sir! I believe that you need only investigate whatever tickles your curiosity, Sir Wataru!” the soldier accompanying him answered with a salute. He had been sent along with Wataru to assist him. What a strange, half-baked way to carry out an investigation.

“Well, alright. Guess I’ll sell the bandits we just caught.”

“Yes, sir!”

They had by coincidence encountered bandits on the way there. That would be a nice source of some pocket change.

* * *

“Well, when it comes to gathering information, the first step is always to talk to a food stand owner.”

“Yes, sir! Er... Are we not going to visit the busy food stand over there, with the line?”

“What? Of course not. He’s busy handling customers, we don’t

need to waste his time with irrelevant talk. That'd be rude."

He was right. But at that moment, a woman let out a loud scream from behind the stand.

"Oh wow, so that stand sells fried potatoes, huh?" Wataru said to an unrelated stand owner.

"Yeah. And I hear Baron Choice's own daughter runs the stand sometimes."

The guard was confused that Wataru was casually continuing his investigation and ignoring the scream.

"A-Ahem, Sir Wataru? Aren't you going to go help?"

"Nah, the daughter of a baron will have her own guards. I don't want to steal their jobs."

"I see..."

* * *

Given that they were investigating a god, Wataru and the soldier went to investigate a local church.

"Oh, so this used to be a church worshipping the Light God?"

"Indeed. But the Church of Lux was expelled from the country when Dragon the Hero, an agent of the Light God, killed our king. In its place spread Beddism, a peaceful religion that worshipped no gods at all."

"Still, to think the whole country would switch over to Beddism. That's pretty surprising."

"It is a sign of the times. Everyone was so exhausted from the chaos that few protested the country-wide adoption of Beddism... And looking back, we can rest assured that it was the best decision we could have made."

Wataru was talking to one of the priests in the church.

"Sir Wataru, should we question the girl over there?" the soldier asked, pointing to a finely-dressed noble girl kneeling before a broken statue of the Light God and offering up a sincere prayer.

"Huh? We shouldn't interrupt her praying. She doesn't look like she's a Beddhist."

"I see..."

* * *

And so, the time for their investigation came to an end.

"Man, this sure is a busy country, huh?"

"...Excuse me, Sir Wataru. If you'll forgive me for asking, it seems that you have been keeping an unnatural distance from women throughout this journey. Is there some purpose to that?" the soldier asked.

Wataru scratched his cheek. "Ahhh... Well, you see. The truth is, Neruneh... the girl I like saw me guarding Princess Mephy recently, and she got entirely the wrong idea. I've been trying to avoid letting

something like that happen again.”

“Ah, I see.” The soldier nodded and wrote that down just to be safe.

.....

Daide Investigation Report. Written By Reidlos.

Summary: I infiltrated the country of Daide (henceforth referred to as D) with Wataru the Hero (henceforth referred to as W) in a reconnaissance mission. During this mission we used W's Hero Skill to aid our search. This method was devised by Baron Goren, and one goal of this mission is to see whether it is truly effective.

Results: We discovered that there certainly is a devious plot occurring within D. In particular, it appears that noble women are being targeted for something. Furthermore, this form of investigation does seem to produce results. It is worth considering using W's skill for investigations in the future on an official basis.

Details: While traveling to D with W, we came across a carriage being attacked by bandits. The carriage belonged to Baron Flag. W got in between the carriage and the bandits, then defeated them. Baron Flag's carriage raced off without noticing this. (During our investigation we learned that Baron Flag's daughter was in the carriage).

W began talking to the locals for information. W avoided a popular stand and boldly spoke to the owner of a nearby stand. We learned that Baron Choice's daughter worked the popular stand. We heard a scream from there, but W ignored it, as he thought it was a matter best left to her bodyguards.

We visited a Beddhist church. It used to worship the Light God as a part of the Church of Lux, but Suzuki the Hero killing the king one year ago led to the entire country shifting to Beddhistism due to its peaceful nature and peculiar lack of a god. But the church lacked a bible, and it seemed suspicious in general.

Furthermore, Baron Steel's daughter was praying in the church as we visited, but W sought out a priest to talk to instead. According to the priest, Baron Steel's daughter was praying to her own god, which meant she was not a Beddhist. It was possible that she belonged to the Church of Lux, but I believe we should consider the possibility of her worshipping Chaos.

(Redacted)

Throughout W's stay in D we crossed with eighty-seven noble daughters, avoiding eighty-two and coming into contact with five. But even when we came into contact with them, W avoided delving deeply into their affairs and left as soon as possible. According to W, the woman he has affection for noticed him guarding the imperial princess and misunderstood what was going on, so he has started

avoiding women where he can help it to avoid a repeat incident. That said, I believe that W's skill is also having an effect here.

.....

Haku furrowed her brows as she read the report she had been given the other day.

“...It seems very likely that Leona is involved, as expected. But why noble daughters...? What in the world is Leona planning?”

Perhaps I should discuss this with Keima. The Dungeon Battle has just finished, so he should be preparing to leave now. There's still time, Haku thought, and at that moment Rokuko opened the door to her office.

“Sister. Let's kiss.”

“What?!”

It was so sudden and shocking that Haku accidentally ripped the report. And what followed was even more shocking, too. It was a very long time before Haku remembered the report, but well, who could blame here?

The Source of the Trends

Misha, the guildmaster of the imperial capital's adventurer's guild, was awake. Reason being, she had been ordered to assist Keima as much as possible by Haku, her boss and the ruler of the Laverio Empire. Misha had to wake up for work. She couldn't sleep and do work at the same time.

Then came two more orders: Spread knowledge of the dungeon, and make the songs popular.

“Siiigh. Making the dungeon well known is one thing, but making the songs popular is ridiculous. If it were easy to make songs popular there wouldn't be any music writers!”

Misha didn't understand music. The best she could tell when listening to it was whether it would help her go to sleep or not, and the song Keima made was nothing but noise. It got stuck in her head and she could still hear it playing.

“Well... Meh. Guess I've gotta do what I can,” Misha said, holding up a pen. “Guess I'll send out special quests to adventurers that like cute things... or I would, but that's suspicious, so I'll just direct some information brokers to guide the right people to the right places... Hmm, let's assume I can hum the song to teach it to someone...”

Misha steadily wrote up the necessary documents. She was a good worker when she put the effort in—her long years of serving Haku weren't just for show.

“Oh, right, I can just use Mephy here. No one better than the imperial princess to use for marketing... Oh, but sending her to investigate the dungeon will just show that she's interested, not much

else. I guess the imperial princess being interested in something is still a pretty big deal. Okay, I'll direct some minstrels to go play where Mephy sneaks out of the castle to visit... Hmmm, but I don't think humming will be enough for them to play the actual song. What a pain..."

Sending the minstrels to a public performance of a song—a live show, in other words, would require her to write up the documents for assigning guards to them. She would send some artists along as well. Merchants? Well, that could come later.

She finished the documents regarding the live show and entrusted them to her skilled vice chief. But Misha didn't rest yet.

"Guuuh, I'm so tired, but I've gotta keep going. I'll put minstrels where Mephy goes... oh, or maybe I should spread them throughout the entire imperial city? I can just pay them to advertise... Let's see, how many silvers would it cost to play that song all day? Mmm, should I borrow lie detecting magic tools to make sure they carry out their part of the deal? I feel like that might end up costing more than what I'm paying them... Ah, but I still have to buy them. It'll demotivate the honest ones to see the dishonest ones getting paid to not do anything."

In any case, Misha thought of which method would cost the least. The funds for this mission were coming out of Misha's pocket money as a punishment for various things she had done. She needed to minimize costs wherever she could.

"I guess lie detection is the best method; the one that flashes red if you lie while touching it. The magic stones will be practically free if I charge liars for the ones wasted."

Perfect. She wrote up the documents for that too. All that was left was to direct some people to double check on the minstrels.

And so, once that was done and the plans for after the live show was made, Misha could finally take a breather.

* * *

But things rarely go as planned.

"What the heeeeck?! Why are there so many minstrels?!"

On the day of the journey to the live show, there were five times as many people planning to go to the dungeon as expected.

"...It seems that rumors of the trip spread further than expected."

Apparently the information brokers she had paid spread the rumors far more eagerly than she expected... or not. Instead, people had just spread the word themselves. Misha didn't really get the song herself, but it touched the hearts of the minstrels. When they heard the information brokers humming they all wanted to hear the song themselves, leading to a mountain of people wanting to go.

It was only then that Misha realized how strange it was that

someone like her, uninterested in music, would learn the song well enough to hum it just to convey it to information brokers.

“...O-Oh, geez. This isn’t what I expected... Ah, wait! I need to cancel the subsidies!”

It was then that Misha remembered she had cleverly spread the rumor that minstrels who played the song all day would be given a subsidy payment. She hurriedly addressed the matter with her vice chief.

“S-So, yeah! Cancel the subsidies, or at least lower them a lot!”

“...I already accounted for it in our budget, but well, it should be feasible to lower the subsidy amounts.”

She narrowly succeeded in stopping it in time.

“We cannot take back rumors that have already spread, but we can lower it down to five coppers. That will be a significant decrease from the original silvers.”

“Uh-huh, thank you thank you. Wheeew.”

Misha sighed in relief. She had nearly just broken her bank.

“Incidentally, should we still borrow the lie detecting magic tools?”

“Mmm, I dunno about using magic tools for just five coppers... I think we should just cancel.”

“Consider it done.”

And so, the minstrels were all enraptured by idol culture. Although they were a bit disappointed in how cheap the subsidies were, they did their job spreading the songs anyway. At some point dangers got involved as well, and small-scale musicals were being held on the street.

...The surprising boom of popularity would surely lead to Haku praising her and forgiving her for how she had been napping during work that one day. Surely.

Golem Band (Full Lyrics to Ichigo’s Famous Song Included)

“So yeah, we got some instruments from Haku.” She gave them to us because the musicians in her castle apparently didn’t need them. Most of them were percussion instruments. As for string instruments... there were some harp-looking things. There weren’t any wind instruments like flutes or trumpets. That was fine, since golems would be the ones playing them, and they couldn’t use anything that required blowing. Though if I really wanted to, I could just use {Create Golem} to turn the instruments themselves into golems.

“Keima, can they actually play the instruments?” Mikan asked.

“...They can make sounds, at least. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

In any case, I first had a golem hit the drums. The golem maintained a steady rhythm, hitting it regularly at the same strength in a pretty nice way.

“Oh wow, nice! It’s like bong, booong!” Mikan said.

“Lemme speed it up a bit... Okay, this should be a good base.”

I had the golem hit it at a steady four-beat pace.

“Let me add in a golem hitting a drum after a longer pause, a golem clapping cymbals...”

Don, don don, ting, dong dong dong ting. Did that sound good to you? Because it sounded good to me.

“And there you have it.”

“Woow! That’s awesome! So this is music, huh!”

“Next up I’ll add in a xylophone and a glockenspiel to make a melody.”

“Neat! You can make whole songs, Keima? That’s amazing.”

“...Well, I can read sheet music, at least.”

I had learned that back in music class at school. I had seen some sheet music in this world, and luckily we seemed to share staff notation on a do-re-mi scale. Maybe a hero spread them in this world.

And so, with my ring Succubus Kosaki’s help, I succeeded in making a *charming* song. I transformed into a Succubus at night and stealthily put it all together. *Man, when I’m Succuma I sure end up feeling all powerful. It’s kind of impressive really. It’s so convenient I just keep on using it and using it... Sigh...*

I bought some sheet music from Japan using DP, and having a bunch of examples really helped me work things out.

The lyrics went like so, by the way:

~ □ ~ □ ~

A Rabbit in Love is Always Straightforward. Written by P. Succuma.

I want these feelings to reach you right right right nooooow! I’m a rabbit in love!

Why are our ears so big? To hear everything you say!

Even our big big jumps are all to get to you fasteeer!

Our whole bodieees! My whole bodyyy!

Is all to make this love come true!

Moonlit nights aren’t enooough!

I’m heading right forward no matter where you gooo! I won’t hold baaack!

I want you these feelings to reach you right right right nooooow! I’m a rabbit in love!

Why are we so fluffy? To warm your heart!

I wanna run run run right next to you!

I take a single step closeeer!

These feelings are maaagiiic!

You're not escaping meeee!

Moonlit nights aren't enooough!

I'm heading right forward no matter where you gooo! I won't hold baaack!

I want you these feelings to reach you right right right nooooow!
I'm a rabbit in love!

~ □ ~ □ ~

...Yeah, that's what you get when you mix late night excitement with Succubus mode. Oh man. I sure cradled my head when I woke up and looked over the lyrics. Kosaki said it was hella amazing and she could pump out two more, but I dunno. (Also, I had to do a quick pass to fix up auto-translator errors. Fantasy world language and idol music didn't mix super well, it seemed).

"...The song's done. All we need to do is have the golems play music according to this sheet music."

"Whoa! You're amazing!"

I instructed the golems to hit their xylophones according to the music note I was pointing at, then taught them to play the song by tracing my finger along the sheet music at a steady pace. They were like music boxes you could teach... and with that done, all I needed to do was let golems handle the busywork of tracing a finger along the paper. *This is kind of like playing a rhythm game on auto mode... Golems would definitely get a full combo if they played a rhythm game. They sure are convenient.*

And so, the band of golem musicians was completed in no time.

"By the way, Keima! What about the lyrics? Do you think Ichigo will be able to learn the lyrics right...?"

"Don't sweat it. We're holding some secret training sessions." *It won't be too hard to teach her using my Succubus powers. Man... Succubi are real convenient too. Like way too convenient. It's like I'm exploiting the power of love for commercial purposes.*

"...Mikan. Don't look into the training room when I'm training Ichigo. Rokuko and the others must never be allowed to see what's going on."

"Oh, you're doing pervy things to her? Well, I'm sure she doesn't mind if it's you, Keima!"

"Say what? You want to get turned into a skewer, buddy?"

"I-I was just kidding! Okay! I won't look!"

And so, my idol training plan was progressing smoothly.









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Lazy Dungeon Master: Volume 11
by Supana Onikage

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